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*The Invisible
Playmate
and
W - W
her book
by*

❁ William Canton: ❁



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THE INVISIBLE PLAYMATE

AND

W. V. HER BOOK

This book, for the publication of which I am indebted to Messrs. Dodd, Mead and Company, contains "The Invisible Playmate" and "W. V., Her Book," revised, enlarged, and in the definitive and only form in which I desire to offer it to the good will of the American people.

WILLIAM CANTON.

/



"Thank you, Mr. Oakman"

THE
INVISIBLE PLAYMATE
AND
W. V. HER BOOK

BY
WILLIAM CANTON

With Two Illustrations by C. E. Brock



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THE MOTHER OF W. V.

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**THE INVISIBLE
PLAYMATE**

I

*The poor lost image brought back plain as
dreams.*

BROWNING

*No visual shade of some one lost,
But he, the Spirit himself, may come
When all the nerve of sense is numb.*

TENNYSON

*God, by God's ways occult,
May — doth, I will believe — bring back
All wanderers to a single track.*

BROWNING

*Vous voyez sous mon rire mes larmes,
Vieux arbres, n'est-ce pas ? et vous n'avez pas cru
Que j'oublierai jamais le petit disparu.*

HUGO

THE INVISIBLE PLAYMATE

THE following pages are taken from a series of letters which I received a year or two ago ; and since no one is now left to be affected by the publication of them it can be no abuse of the writer's confidence to employ them for the purpose I have in view. Only by such extracts can I convey any clear impression of the character of the person most concerned.

To many the chief interest in what follows will centre in the unconscious self-portraiture of the writer. Others may be most attracted by the frank and naïve picture of child-life. And yet a third class of readers may decide that the one passage of any real value is that which describes the incident with which the record closes. On these matters, how-

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ever, any comment from me appears to be unnecessary.

I need only add that the writer of the letters was twice married, and that just before the death of his first wife their only child, a girl, died at the age of six weeks.

“I never could understand why men should be so insanely set on their first-born being a boy. This of ours, I am glad to say, is a girl. I should have been pleased either way, but as a matter of fact I wanted a girl. I don't know why, but somehow with a girl one feels that one has provided against the disillusionment, the discomfort, the homelessness of old age and of mental and physical decrepitude.

“For one thing above all others I am grateful: that, so far as I can see, heredity has played no horrible pranks upon us. The poor little mortal is wholesome and shapely from her downy little poll to her little pink toe-nails. She could not have been lovelier if Math had made her out of flowers (or was it Gwydion? You remember the *Mabinogion*). And she grips

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hard enough already to remind one of her remote arboreal ancestors. One of God's own ape-lets in the Tree of Life !”

“Exultant ! No, dear C—, anything but that ! Glad as I am, I am morbidly apprehensive and alert to a myriad possibilities of misery. I am all *quick*. I feel as though I had shed my epidermis, and had but ‘true skin’ for every breath and touch of mischance to play upon.

“*I have been through it all before.* I was exultant then. I rode a bay trotting-horse, and was proud of heart and wore gloves in my cap. I feel sick at heart when I think how I was wrapped up in *that* child ; how in my idolatry of her I clean forgot the savage irony of existence ; how, when I was most unsuspecting, most unprepared — unarmed, naked — I was — stabbed from behind !

“I know what you will say. I see the grave look on your face as you read this. Perhaps I ought not to write it. I have never said so much to any one before ; but that is what I felt — what I feel.

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"Do you think, if I can help it, I shall give any one a chance of surprising me so again? This poor little mite can bring my heart with a leap into my throat, or send it down shivering into my boots — that I can't help — but never so long as I live, and dote on her as I may, never shall I again be taken at unawares. I have petrified myself against disaster. Sometimes as I am returning home in the grey dawn, sometimes even when I am putting the latch-key into the lock, I stop and hear an inward voice whispering, 'Baby is dead'; and I reply, 'Then she is dead.' The rest I suppress, ignore, refuse to feel or think. It is not pleasant schooling; but I think it is wise."

To this I presume I must have replied with the usual obvious arguments, for he writes later :

"No; I *don't* think I lose more than I gain. Trust me, I take all I can get: only, I provide against reprisals. Yes; unfortunately all this does sound like Caliban on

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Setebos. Is that Caliban's fault? Dear man, I know I shock you. I almost shock myself; but how can I trust? Shall I bargain and say, 'You took the other: ensure me this one, and I will think You as good and wise and merciful — as a man?' And if I make no bargain, but simply profess belief that 'all was for the best,' will that destroy the memory of all that horror and anguish? Job! The author of 'Job' knew more about astronomy than he knew about fatherhood.

"The anguish and horror were perchance meant for my chastening! Am I a man to be chastened in that way? Or will you say, perhaps but for these you would have been a lost soul by this? To such questionings there is no end. As to selfishness, I will suffer anything for her sake; but how will *she* profit by my suffering *for the loss of her?*"

After an interval he wrote:

"You are very good to take so much interest in the Heiress of the Ages. We have experienced some of the ordinary

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troubles—and let me gravely assure you that this is the single point in which she does resemble other children—but she is well at present and growing visibly. The Norse god who heard the growing of the grass and of the wool on the sheep's back would have been stunned with the *tintamarre* of her development.

“Thereto she *noticeth*. So saith her mother; so averreth the nurse, an experienced and unimpeachable witness. Think of it, C! As the human mind is the one reality amid phenomena, this young person is really establishing and giving permanence to certain bits of creation. To that extent the universe is the more solid on her account.

“Nor are her virtue and excellency confined to noticing; she positively radiates. Where she is, that is the sunny side of the house. I am no longer surprised at the folk-belief about the passing of a maiden making the fields fertile. I observe that in the sheltered places where she is taken for an airing the temperature is the more genial, the trees are in greener leaf, and the

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red half of the apple is that nearest the road. . . .

"Accept for future use this shrewd discovery from my experience. When a baby is restless and fretful, *hold its hands!* That steadies it. It is not used to the speed at which the earth revolves and the solar system whirls towards the starry aspect of Hercules (half a million miles a day!). Or it may be that coming out of the vortex of atoms it is sub-conscious of some sense of falling through the void. The gigantic paternal hands close round the warm, tiny, twitching fists, soft as grass and strong as the everlasting hills.

"I wonder if those worthy old Accadians had any notion of this when they prayed, 'Hold Thou my hands.'"

In several subsequent letters he refers to the growth and the charming ways of the "little quadruped," the "quadrumanous angel," the "bishop" (from an odd resemblance in the pose of the head to the late Bishop of Manchester). One passage must be given:

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"It is an 'animal most gracious and benignant,' as Francesca calls Dante. Propped up with cushions, she will sit for half an hour on the rug at my feet while I am writing, content to have her fluffy head patted at the end of every second paragraph.

"This evening she and I had the study to ourselves. She on my knee, cosily snuggling within my arm, with a tiny hand clasped about each thumb. We were sitting by the window, and the western sky was filled with a lovely green light, which died out very slowly. It was the strangest and dreamiest of afterglows. She was curiously quiet and contented. As she sat like that, my mind went back to that old life of mine, that past which seems so many centuries away; and I remembered how that poor little white creature of those unforgettable six weeks sat where *she* was now sitting — so unlike *her*, so white and frail and old-womanish, with her wasted arms crossed before her, and her thin, worn face fading, fading, fading away into the everlasting dark. Why does — how *can* things like these happen?

"She would have been nine now if she

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had lived. How she would have loved this tiny sister ! ”

“ You will be amused, perhaps you will be amazed, at my foolishness. When the post-man hands you *Rhymes about a Little Woman*¹ you will understand what I mean. In trotting up and down with the Immortal in my arms, crooning her to sleep, these rhymes *came*. I did not *make* them ! And sing—don’t read them. Seriously, the noticeable thing about them is their unlikeness to fictitious child-poems. I did not print them on that account, of course. But to me it will always be a pleasant thing to see, when I am very, very old, that genuine bit of the past. And I like to fancy that some day she will read—with eyes not dry—these nonsense verses that her poor old father used to sing to her in

‘ The days before
God shut the doorways of her head.’ ”

“ You remember what I said about the child’s hands ? When I went to bed very

¹ See p. 27.

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late last night, the words, 'Hold Thou my hands,' kept floating about in my mind, and then there grew on me the most perplexing half-recollection of a lovely air. I could not remember it quite, but it simply haunted me. Then, somehow, these words seemed to grow into it and out of it :

Hold Thou my hands !
In grief and joy, in hope and fear,
Lord, let me *feel* that Thou art near,
Hold Thou my hands !

If e'er by doubts
Of Thy good fatherhood depressed,
I cannot find in Thee my rest,
Hold Thou my hands !

Hold Thou my hands, —
These passionate hands too quick to smite,
These hands so eager for delight, —
Hold Thou my hands !

And when at length,
With darkened eyes and fingers cold,
I seek some last loved hand to hold,
Hold Thou my hands !

"I could endure it no longer, so I woke N [his wife]. I was as gentle, gradual, considerate as possible ! — just as if she were

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waking naturally. And she *re-mon-strat-ed* !
'The idea of waking any one at three in the morning to bother about a tune !' Dear, dear !

"Well, it was from 'The Yeoman of the Guard.' You will know where by the rhythm and refrain !"

As the months went by the "benign anthropoid" developed into a "stodgy volatile elephant with a precarious faculty of speech," and her father affected to be engrossed in ethnological and linguistic studies based on observation of her experiments in life and language. I now extract without further interpolation, merely premising that frequent intervals elapsed between the writing of the various passages, and that they themselves are but a small selection from many similar :

"The 'golden ephelant' is unquestionably of Early-English origin. Perpend : we in our degeneracy say 'milk' ; she preserves the Anglo-Saxon 'meolc.' Hengist and Horsa would recognise her as a kinswoman. Through the long ages between

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them and her, the pleasant guttural pronunciation of the ancient pastures has been discarded by all but the traditional dairyman, and even he has modified the *o* into *u*. Similarly a 'wheel' is a 'hwéol.' But, indeed, she is more A-S than the Anglo-Saxons themselves. All her verbs end in 'en,' even 'I am-en.'"

"It is singularly interesting to me to watch the way in which she adapts words to her purposes. As she sits so much on our knees, she uses 'knee' for 'to sit down.' To-day she made me 'knee' in the arm-chair beside her. 'Too big' expresses, comically enough sometimes, all kinds of impossibility. She asked me to play one of her favourite tunes. 'Pappa cannot, dearie,' 'Oh!' — with much surprise — 'Too big?'"

"Oh, man, man, what wonderful creatures these bairnies are! Did it ever occur to you that they must be the majority of the human race? The men and women combined may be about as numerous, but they must far outnumber the men or the women

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taken separately, and as all the women and most of the men — bad as they are — side with them, what a political power they might be, if they had their rights! I have been thinking of this swarming of the miniature people, all over the globe, during the last few days. Could one but make a poem of *that*! I tried — and failed. ‘Too big!’ But I did the next best thing — conceived an *Unknown German Child-poem*, and — what think you? — reviewed it.¹ If after reading it, the ‘Astrologer’ [a hypercritical young friend] tells you it reminds him of Carlyle, just ask him whether he never, *never* heard of Richter.”

“She delights in music and drawing. It is curious how sharp she is to recognise things. She picked out a baby in a picture the other day, and discovered a robin among the flowers and leaves high up on a painted panel of the mirror. What a contrast to the grown men of half-savage tribes one reads of, who cannot distinguish a house from a tree in a drawing! She has, too, quite an extraordinary ear for rhyme and rhythm. I

¹ See p. 47.

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find, to my amazement, that she can fill in the rhymes of a nonsense poem of twenty lines — 'What shall we do to be rid of care?' by the way ¹ — and when she does not know the words of a verse, she times out the metre with the right number of blanks.

"One is puzzled, all the while, to know how much she *understands*. In one of her rhymes she sings, 'Birds are singing in the bowers.' The other day as she was chanting it a dog went by; 'That, bowers!' (bow-wows!) she cried suddenly, pointing to the dog."

"To-day she was frightened for the first time. We heard her roaring, 'No, no,' in great wrath in the garden. A sparrow had dropped on the grass somewhere near her, and she was stamping and waving her hands in a perfect panic. When she found it was not to be driven away, she came sweeping in like a little elephant, screaming for 'mam-ma' to take up arms against that audacious 'dicken.' It was really ludicrous to see her terrorised by that handful of feathers.

¹ See p. 33.

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"Yet she is not a bit afraid of big things. The dog in the kennel barked the first time she went near him. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, with a little laugh of surprise, 'coughing!' Now she says, 'He not bark; only say good morning.' She *must* kiss the donkey's forehead; she invites the mother-hen to shake hands, and the other day she was indignant that I would not hold a locomotive till she 't'oked it dear head.' She has a comfortable notion that things in general were intended for her. If she wants a cow or a yoke of horses with the ploughman for a play-thing, it is but to 'ask my pappa' and have. The wind and the rain and the moon 'walking' come out to see *her*, and the flowers 'wake up' with the same laudable object."

"Yes; a child has a civilising effect. I feel that I am less of a bear than I was. It is with some men as it is with the black-thorn; the little white *flower* comes out first, and then the whole gnarled faggot breaks into *leaf*."

"I came to-day across a beautiful little bit from the letters of Marcus Aurelius. 'On

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my return from Lorium I found my little lady — *domnulam meam* — in a fever ;' later : 'You will be glad to hear that our little one is better and running about the room.' The old Emperor was one of ourselves. Indeed, look at his face in those marble busts in the Museum ; he might have been a man of our own generation. It was he, I remember, who wrote, '*One* prays — How shall I not lose my little son ? Do *thou* pray thus — How shall I not be afraid to lose him ?' Ah, how shall I not be afraid !"

"We have had our first walk in the dark — a dark crowded with stars. She had never seen it before. It perplexed her, I think, for she stood and looked and said nothing. But it did not frighten her in the least.

"I want her to have some one marvellous thing impressed on her memory — some one ineffable recollection of childhood ; and it is to be the darkness associated with shining stars and a safe feeling that her father took her out into it. This is to last all through her life — till the 'great dark' comes ; so

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that when it does come, it shall be with an old familiar sense of fatherhood and starlight.

“You will laugh at me — but oh, no! you will not laugh — when I tell you what a horror haunts me lest I should die before her little brain has been stamped with a vivid memory of me — clear as life, never to be obliterated, never even to be blurred. Who was it named Augustine ‘the son of the tears of St. Monica’? This child might well be called the daughter of my tears — yet they have not been bitter ones.

“When she did speak — fluently at last — it was to suppose that a good many pipes were being lit up in the celestial spaces! This was both prosy and impossible, yet what could I say? Ah, well! some day she shall learn that the stars are not vestas, and that the dark is only the planetary shadow of a great rock in a blue and weary land — though little cause have I now of all men to call it weary! Has that notion of the shadow ever occurred to you? And do you ever think of night on one of the small planetoids, five miles in diameter? That were the

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shadow of a mere boulder ; and yet on that boulder, though there can be neither water nor air there, what if there were some unknown form of motherhood, of babyhood, curled up asleep in the darkness?

"But to return to Pinaforifera. Thinking these stars but vestas for the lighting of pipes, what must she do but try to blow them out, as she blows out her 'dad's'! I checked that at once, for i' faith this young person's powers are too miraculous to allow of any trifling with the stellar systems."

"I fear I must weary you with these 'trivial fond records.' Really she is very interesting. 'Ever what you doing?' 'Upon *my* word!' 'Dear iccle c'eature!' 'Poor my hands!'—just as people used to say, 'Good my lord!'"

"What heartless little wretches they are after all! Sometimes, when I ask her for a kiss, she puts her head aside and coolly replies, 'I don't want to!' What can you say to that? One must respect her individuality, though she is but a child. Now and

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again she has her tender moments : 'I shut-a door and leave poor you?' 'Yes, you did, dear.' 'I stay with you!' — which means inexpressible things. You should see the odd coaxing way in which she says, '*My* father!' Then this to her doll: 'You cry? I kiss you. You not cry no more.'"

"Upon my life I am growing imbecile under the influence of this Pinaforifera. I met a very old, wrinkled, wizened little woman to-day, and as I looked at her poor dim eyes and weathered face, it flashed upon me like an inspiration — 'And she, too, was once a rosy, merry little mortal who set some poor silly dad doting!' Then at the station I came across what seemed to me quite an incident — but, there, I have been daft enough to write the matter out in full, and you can read it, if paternity and its muddle-headedness do not fill your soul with loathing."¹

"By the way, she has got a new play-thing. I do not know what suggested the idea; I don't think it came from any of us.

¹ See p. 63.

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Lately she has taken to nursing an invisible 'iccle gaal' (little girl) whom she wheels about in her toy perambulator, puts carefully to bed, and generally makes much of. This is—'Yourn iccle baby, pappa, old man!' if you please. When I sit down, this accession to the family is manifest to her on my right knee; and she sits on my left and calls it a 'nice lovely iccle thing.' When she goes to bed she takes Struw-welpeter, Sambo (a sweet being in black india-rubber), and, of all people, Mrs. Grundy; and when she has been tucked in she makes place for 'yourn iccle baby,' which, of course, I have to give her with due care. It is very odd to see her put her hands together for it, palms upward, and to hear her assurance, 'I not let her fall, pappa.' "

"What droll little brains children have!
In Struw-welpeter, as probably you are not
aware, naughty Frederick hurts his leg, and
has to be put to bed; and

'The doctor came and shook his head,
And gave him nasty physic too.'

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This evening, as baby was prancing about in her night-dress, her mother told her she would catch cold, and then she would be ill and would have to be put to bed. 'And will the doctor come and shook my head?' she asked eagerly. Of course we laughed outright; but the young person was right for all that. If the doctor was to do any good, it could not conceivably be by shaking his own head!"

"I told you about her invisible playmate. Both N [his wife] and I have been wondering whether the child is only what is called making-believe, or whether she really sees anything. I suppose you have read Galton's account of the power of 'visualising,' as he calls it; that is, of actually seeing outside of one the appearance of things that exist only in imagination. He says somewhere that this faculty is very strongly developed in some young children, who are beset for years with the difficulty of distinguishing between the objective and the subjective. It is hard to say how one should act in a case of this sort. To en-

The Invisible Playmate

courage her in this amusement might lead to some morbid mental condition; to try to suppress it might be equally injurious, for this appears to be a natural faculty, not a disease. Let nature have her own way?

"If I rest my foot on my right knee to unlace my boot, she pulls my foot away — 'Pappa, you put yourn foot on yourn iccle baby.' She won't sit on my right knee at all until I have pretended to transfer the playmate to the other.

"This girl is going to be a novelist. We have got a rival to the great Mrs. Harris. She has invented Mrs. Briss. No one knows who Mrs. Briss is. Sometimes she seems to mean herself; at other times it is clearly an interesting and inscrutable third person."

"The poor wee ape is ill. The doctor doesn't seem to understand what is the matter with her. We must wait a day or two for some development."

"How these ten days and nights have dragged past! Do not ask me about her. I cannot write. I cannot think."

The Invisible Playmate

"My poor darling is dead! I hardly know whether I am myself alive. Half of my individuality has left me. I do not know myself.

"Can you believe this? I cannot; and yet I saw it. A little while before she died I heard her speaking in an almost inaudible whisper. I knelt down and leaned over her. She looked curiously at me and said faintly: 'Pappa, I not let her fall.' 'Who, dearie?' 'Yourn iccle baby. I gotten her in here.' She moved her wasted little hand as if to lift a fold of the bed-clothes. I raised them gently for her, and she smiled like her old self. How can I tell the rest?

"Close beside her lay that other little one, with its white worn face and its poor arms crossed in that old-womanish fashion in front of her. Its large, suffering eyes looked for a moment into mine, and then my head seemed filled with mist and my ears buzzed.

"*I saw that.* It was not hallucination. It was *there*.

"Just think what it means, if that actually happened. Think what must have been going on in the past, *and I never knew*. I remember, now, she never called it 'mamma's

The Invisible Playmate

baby' ; it was always 'yourn.' Think of the future, now that they are both — what? Gone?

"If it actually happened! I *saw* it. I am sane, strong, in sound health. I saw it — *saw* it — do you understand? And yet how incredible it is!"

Some months passed before I heard again from my friend. In his subsequent letters, which grew rarer and briefer as time went on, he never again referred to his loss or to the incident which he had described.

His silence was singular, for he was naturally very communicative. But what most surprised me was the absolute change of character that seemed to have been brought about in an instant — literally in the twinkling of an eye. One glimpse of the Unseen (as he called it) and the embittered recollections of bereavement, the resentment, the distrust, the spirit of revolt were all swept into oblivion. Even the new bereavement had no sting. There was no anguish; there were no words of desolation. The man simply stood at gaze, stunned with amazement.

**RHYMES ABOUT A
LITTLE WOMAN**

See p. 11.

She is my pride ; my plague : my rest ; my rack :
my bliss ; my bane :
She brings me sunshine of the heart : and soft'ning
of the brain.

RHYMES ABOUT A LITTLE WOMAN

I

SHE's very, very beautiful ; but — alas ! —
Is n't it a pity that her eyes are glass ?
And her face is only wax, coloured up, you
 know ;
And her hair is just a fluff of very fine tow !

No ! — she's *not* a doll. That will never
 do —

Never, never, never, for it is not true !

Did they call you a doll ? Did they say that
 to *you* ?

Oh, your eyes are little heavens of an earth
 made new ;

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Your face, it is the blossom of mortal things ;
Your hair might be the down from an angel's
wings !

Oh, yes ; she 's beauti-beautiful ! What
else could she be ?

God meant her for Himself first, then
gave her to me.

II

SHE was a treasure ; she was a sweet ;
She was the darling of the Army and
the Fleet !

When — she — smiled
The crews of the line-of-battle ships went
wild !

When — she — cried —
Whole regiments reversed their arms and
sighed !

When she was sick, for her sake
The Queen took off her crown and sobbed
as if her heart would break.

III

LOOK at her shoulders now they are
bare;
Are there any signs of feathers growing
there?

No, not a trace ; she cannot fly away ;
This wingless little angel has been sent to
stay.

IV

WHAT shall we do to be rid of care?
Pack up her best clothes and pay
her fare ;

Pay her fare and let her go
By an early train to Jer-I-Cho.

There in Judæa she will be
Slumbering under a green palm-tree ;

And the Arabs of the Desert will come
round
When they see her lying on the ground,

And some will say " Did you ever see
Such a remark-a-bil babee ? "

The Invisible Playmate

And others, in the language the Arabs use,
“ *Nous n'avons jamais vu une telle papoose !* ”

And she will grow and grow ; and then
She will marry a chief of the Desert men ;

And he will keep her from heat and cold,
And deck her in silk and satin and gold —

With bangles for her feet and jewels for her
hair,
And other articles that ladies wear !

So pack up her best clothes, and let her go
By an early train to Jer-I-Cho !

Pack up her best clothes, and pay her fare ;
So *we* shall be rid of trouble and care !

TAKE the idol to her shrine ;
In her cradle lay her !
Worship her — she is divine ;
Offer up your prayer !
She will bless you, bed and board,
If befittingly adored.

VI

ON a summer morning, Babsie up a tree ;
In came a Blackbird, sat on Babsie's
knee.

Babsie to Blackbird — “ Blackbird, how you
do? ”

Blackbird to Babsie — “ Babsie, how was
you? ”

“ How was *you* in this commodious tree —
How was *you* and all your famu — ilu — ee? ”

VII

THIS is the way the ladies ride —
Saddle-a-side, saddle-a-side !

This is the way the gentlemen ride —
Sitting astride, sitting astride !

This is the way the grandmothers ride —
Bundled and tied, bundled and tied !

This is the way the babbykins ride —
Snuggled inside, snuggled inside !

This is the way, when they are late,
They *all* fly over a five-barred gate !

VIII

WE are not wealthy ; but, you see,
Others are far worse off than we.

Here 's a gaberlunzie begging at the door —
If we gave him Babs, he 'd need no more !

Oh, she 'll fill your cup, and she 'll fill your
can ;
She 'll make you happy, happy ! Take her,
beggar man !

Give a beggar Babsie ? Give this child away ?
That would leave *us* poor, and poor, for ever
and a day !

Rhymes about a Little Woman

After-thought —

The gaberlunzie man is sad ;
The Babe is far from glee ;
He with his poverty is plagued —
And with her poor teeth ¹ she !

¹ As who should say “poortith.”

IX

OH, where have you been, and how do
you do,
And what did you beg, or borrow, or buy
For this little girl with the sash of blue?

Why,
A cushie-coo ; and a cockatoo ;
And a cariboo ; and a kangaroo ;
And a croodlin' doo ; and a quag from the
Zoo —
And *all* for the girl with the sash of blue !

x

WHEN she's very thirsty, what does
she do?

She croons to us in Doric ; she murmurs
" A-coo ! "

Oh, the little Scotch girl, who would ever
think

She 'd want a coo — a whole coo — needing
but a drink !

Moo, moo ! — a coo !

Mammie 's gone to market ; Mammie 'll soon
be here ;

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Mammie's bought a brindled coo ! Patience,
woman dear !

Don't you hear your Crummie lowing in the
lane ?

She's going up to pasture ; we'll bring her
home again !

Moo, moo ! — a coo !

Grow sweet, you little wild flowers, about our
Crummie's feet ;

Be glad, you green and patient grass, to have
our Crummie eat ;

And hasten, Crummie, hasten, or what shall
I do ?

For here's a waesome lassie skirlin' for a coo !

Moo, moo ! — a coo !

A moment yet ! The sun is set, and all the
lanes are red ;

And here is Crummie coming to the milking
shed !

Rhymes about a Little Woman

Why, mother, mother, don't you hear this
terrible to-do?

Dépêchez-vous ! A coo — a coo — a kingdom
for a coo !

Moo, moo ! — a coo !

XI

WHEN she laughs and waves about
Her pink small fingers, who can
doubt
She 's catching at the glittering plumes
Of angels flying round the rooms?

XII

POOOR Babbles is dead with sleep ;
Poor Babbles is dead with sleep !
Eyes she hardly can open keep ;
Lower the gas to a glimmering peep.
All good angels, hover and keep
Watch above her — poor Babbles ! — asleep.

**AN UNKNOWN
CHILD-POEM**

See p. 15.

47

**Murmure indistinct, vague, obscur, confus, brouillé :
Dieu, le bon vieux grand-père, écoute émerveillé.**

HUGO

AN UNKNOWN CHILD-POEM

OF all possible books in this age of waste-paper, the wretched little volume before me, labelled *Gedichte* and bearing the name of a certain "Arm : Altegans," is assuredly one of the unluckiest. Outside the Fatherland it cannot by any chance be known to mortal ; and among the author's compatriots I have been unable to discover man, woman, or child who has heard of Altegans, or is aware of the existence of these *Poems* of his. Yet I venture to express the opinion that this scarecrow of a duodecimo, with its worn-out village printer's type and its dingy paper-bag pages, contains some passages which for suggestiveness and for melody of expression are not unworthy of the exquisite "founts" and hand-made papers of wealthier and, perhaps, less noticeable singers.

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Thin as the book is, it contains, as most books do, more than one cares to read ; but even some of this superfluous material is in a measure redeemed by its personal bearing. One catches a glimpse of the man, and after reading his "Erster Schulgang" — the one real poem in the collection — I must confess that I felt some little curiosity and interest in regard to the author. One learns, for instance, that in 1868, when the book was printed, he was a winter-green "hoary-head" ; that he had lost wife and child long ago, in "the years still touched with morning-red" ; that like Hans Sachs, he had —

" bending o'er his leather,
Made many a song and shoe together," —

the shoe better than the song, but, he adds whimsically, "better perchance because of the song" ; that he thought no place in the earth-round could compare with his beloved village of Wieheisstes in the pleasant crag-and-fir region of Schlaraffenland ("Glad am I to have been born in thee, thou heart's-dearest village among the pines" ; and here, by the way, have we not a reminiscence of

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Jean Paul, or is the phrase merely a coincidence?) ; that as a matter of fact, however, he had never during his seventy odd years travelled as many miles as ten from his Wieheisstes ; that though confined in a mere nut-shell of a green valley he was a cosmopolite of infinite space ; that his heart brimmed over with brotherly love for all men — for all women especially, and still more especially, poor hoary-head ! for all children ; but truly for all men — regarding even the levity with which they treated his name rather as a token of affectionate familiarity than as an evidence of ill-breeding, and, indeed, humorously addressing himself in more than one of the *gedichte* as “thou Old-Goose.” Which last play of fancy has caused me to question — without, alas ! hope of answer now — whether the abbreviated prenomem on the title-page stands for a heroic “Arminius” or for an ironical “Armer” or “Arme,” as one prefers the gender ; giving us the net result “Poor Old-Goose !”

Twenty years and more have elapsed since the aged worker in leather and verse gave the “Erster Schulgang” — “First day at

The Invisible Playmate

School," shall we say?—and these personal confidences to an apathetic Germania. Doubtless he has, long since, been gathered to his lost ones in the shadow of the grey-stone blue-slatted little church. Poor singing soul, he is deaf to anything that compatriot or "speech-cousin" can say now of him or of his rhymes!

Let me, nevertheless, attempt to make an *impressioniste* transcript of this "Erster Schulgang." To reproduce the tender, simple music of its verse would be impossible; a mere prose translation would be indeed a — *traduction*.

The poem opens with a wonderful vision of children; delightful as it is unexpected; as romantic in presentment as it is commonplace in fact. All over the world—and all under it, too, when their time comes—the children are trooping to school. The great globe swings round out of the dark into the sun; there is always morning somewhere; and for ever in this shifting region of the morning-light the good Altegens sees the little ones afoot—shining companies and groups, couples and bright solitary fig-

An Unknown Child-Poem

ures; for they all seem to have a soft heavenly light about them!

He sees them in country lanes and rustic villages; on lonely moorlands, where narrow brown foot-tracks thread the expanse of green waste, and occasionally a hawk hovers overhead, or a mountain-ash hangs its scarlet berries above the huge fallen stones set up by the Druids in the old days; he sees them on the hillsides ("trails of little feet darkening the grass all hoary with dew," he observes), in the woods, on the stepping-stones that cross the brook in the glen, along the sea-cliffs and on the wet ribbed sands; trespassing on the railway lines, making short cuts through the corn, sitting in ferry-boats; he sees them in the crowded streets of smoky cities, in small rocky islands, in places far inland where the sea is known only as a strange tradition.

The morning-side of the planet is alive with them; one hears their pattering foot-steps everywhere. And as the vast continents sweep "eastering out of the high shadow which reaches beyond the moon" (here, again, I would have suspected our

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poet of an unconscious reminiscence of Jean Paul, were it not that I remember Sir Thomas Browne has some similar whimsical phrase), and as new nations, with *their* cities and villages, their fields, woods, mountains and sea-shores, rise up into the morning-side, lo ! fresh troops, and still fresh troops, and yet again fresh troops of "these small school-going people of the dawn !"

How the quaint old man loves to linger over this radiant swarming of young life ! He pauses for a moment to notice this or that group, or even some single mite. He marks their various nationalities — the curious little faces of them, as the revolving planet shows him (here he remembers with a smile the coloured wall-maps of the school-room) the red expanse of Europe, the green bulk of America, or the huge yellow territory of the Asiatics. He runs off in a discursive stanza in company with the bird-nesting truant. Like a Greek divinity leaning out of Olympus, he watches a pitched battle between bands of these diminutive Stone-age savages belonging to rival schools. With tender humour he notes the rosy

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beginning of a childish love-idyll between some small Amazon and a smaller urchin whom she has taken under her protection.

What are weather and season to this incessant panorama of childhood? The pigmy people trudge through the snow on moor and hillside; wade down flooded roads; are not to be daunted by wind or rain, frost or the white smother of "millers and bakers at fisticuffs." Most beautiful picture of all, he sees them travelling schoolward by that late moonlight which now and again in the winter months precedes the tardy dawn.

Had the "Erster Schulgang" ended here, I cannot but think the poem would have been worth preserving. This vision, however, is but a prelude and as a prelude it is perhaps disproportionately long. A blue-eyed, flaxen-haired German mädchen of four is the heroine of this "First day at School" — Altegans's own little maiden, perchance, in the years that were; but of this there is no evidence.

What an eventful day in each one's life,

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he moralises, is this first day at school — no other day more truly momentous ; and yet how few of us have any recollection of it !

The first school-going is the most daring of all adventures, the most romantic of all marvellous quests. Palæocrystic voyages, searches for northwest passages, wanderings in the dwarf-peopled forests of dusky continents are trifling matters compared with this. This is the veritable quest for the Sangreal ! “ Each smallest lad as he crosses the home-threshold that morning is a Columbus steering to a new world, to golden Indies that truly lie — at last — beyond the sunset. He is a little Ulysses outward-bound on a long voyage, wherethrough help him, thou dear Heaven, past the Calypso Isles and Harpy-shores lest he perish miserably ! ”

And thus, continues Altegans, after a page or two of such simple philosophising, little “ blue-eyed flax-head ” goes forth, with well-stored satchel and primer, and with a mother’s kiss ; gleeful, it may be ; reluctant, perchance ; into the world, nay into the

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universe, nay into the illimitable cosmos beyond these flaming star-walls; for of all future knowing and loving, and serving and revolt against service, is not this the actual beginning?

Very prettily does he picture the trot of the small feet along the narrow pathway through the fields where the old Adam — the "red earth" of the furrows, he means — is still visible through the soft green blades of the spring corn; the walk along the lanes with their high hedges, and banks of wild flowers, and overhanging clouds of leaf and blossom; the arrival at the rustic schoolhouse; the crowd of strange faces; the buzz and noise of conning and repetition.

And then, behold! as the timid new scholar sits on the well-polished bench, now glancing about at her unknown comrades, now trying to recollect the names and shapes of the letters in her primer, the schoolhouse vanishes into transparent air, and the good Altegans perceives that this little maiden is no longer sitting among German fields!

Instead of the young corn, papyrus-reeds

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are growing tall and thick ; the palm has replaced the northern pine ; Nilus, that ancient river, is flowing past ; far away in the distance he descries the peaks of the Pyramids, while behind the child rises a huge granite obelisk sculptured from apex to base with hieroglyphic characters. For, he asks by way of explaining this startling dissolving view, does not every child when it learns the alphabet sit in the shadow of the sculptured " needle-pillars " of Egypt the ancient ?

Where could this simple village shoemaker have picked up this crumb of knowledge ? It seems only yesterday that Professor Max Müller thought it a matter of sufficient novelty to tell us that " whenever we wrote an *a* or a *b* or a *c*, we wrote what was originally a hieroglyphic picture. Our *L* is the crouching lion ; our *F* the cerastes, a serpent with two horns ; our *H* the Egyptian picture of a sieve."

" O thou tenderest newly-blossomed little soul-and-body, thou freshest-formed flower-image of man," exclaims the emotional

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Altegens, "how strange to see thee shining with this newness in the shadow of the old, old brain-travail, the old, old wisdom of a world dead and buried centuries ago; how strange to see thee, thou tiny prospective ancestress, struggling with the omnipotent tradition of antiquity!

"For, of a truth, of all things in this world-round there is nothing more marvellous than those carven characters, than the many-vocabled colonies which have descended from them, and which have peopled the earth with so much speech and thought, so much joy and sorrow, so much hope and despair.

"Beware of these, thou little child, for they are strong to kill and strong to save! Verily, they are living things, stronger than powers and principalities. When Moses dropped the stone tablets, the wise Rabbis say the letters flew to and fro in the air; the visible form alone was broken, but the divine law remains intact for ever. They are, indeed, alive—they are the visible shapes of what thou canst not see, of what can never die.

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“Heed well these strong ones — Aleph the Ox, the golden cherub whose mighty wings spread athwart the Temple of Solomon, the winged bull that men worshipped in Assyria; him and all his fellows heed thou carefully! They are the lords of the earth, the tyrants of the souls of men. No one can escape them save him alone who hath mastered them. He whom they master is lost, for ‘the letter killeth.’ But these things thou dost not yet understand.”

“Close now thy book, little learner. How Socrates and Solomon would have marvelled to hear the things that thou shalt learn! Close thy book; clap thy hands gladly on the outgoing (*Scottie* skaling) song; hie thee home! Thy dear mother awaits thee, and thy good grey grandfather will look down on thee with shrewd and kindly eyes, and question thee gaily. Run home, thou guileless scholarling; thy mother’s hands are fain of thee.”

A little abruptly perhaps, unless we recollect that half is greater than the whole, the

An Unknown Child-Poem

simple poet flies off at a tangent from his theme, and muses to his own heart :

“And we, too, are children ; this, our first long day at school. Oh, gentle hand, be fain for us when we come home at eventide ; question us tenderly, Thou good Father, Thou ancient One of days.”

So the “Erster Schulgang” closes.

It may be that through temperament or personal associations I have over-valued it. The reader must judge. In any case, you dead, unknown, gentle-hearted Old-Goose, it has been a pleasant task to me to visit in fancy your beloved village of Wieheisstes in the romantic crag-and-fir region of Schlaraffenland, and to write these pages about your poem and yourself.

AT A WAYSIDE STATION

See p. 21.

L'adorable hasard d'être père est tombé
Sur ma tête, et m'a fait une douce fêlure.
Hugo

AT A WAYSIDE STATION

“GOOD-BYE, my darling !”

G The voice shot out cheerily from the window of a second-class carriage at a small suburban station. The speaker evidently did not care a pin who heard him. He was a bustling, rubicund, white-whiskered and white-waistcoated little man of about sixty. As I glanced in his direction I saw that his wife — a faded blue-eyed woman, with a genius for reserve — was placidly settling herself in her seat.

Perception of these details was instantaneous.

“Good-bye, my darling !”

“Good-bye, papa !”

The reply, in a clear, fresh voice, was almost startling in its promptitude.

I looked round ; and then for the next minute and a half, I laughed quietly to myself.

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For, first of all, the bright little girl, the flower of the flock, the small, radiant beauty to whom that voice should have belonged, was a maiden of five and thirty, hopelessly uncomely, and irredeemably high-coloured.

The unmistakable age, the unprepossessing appearance, were thrown into ludicrous contrast by the girlish coyness and bashfulness of her demeanour. When her eyes were not raised to her father's face, they were cast down with a demureness that was altogether irresistible.

The little man mopped his bald scalp, hurriedly arranged some of his belongings in the rack, abruptly darted out another bird-like look, and repeated his farewell.

"Good-bye, my darling !"

"Good-bye, papa !"

It was as though he had touched the spring of a dutiful automaton.

The carriage doors were slammed, the guard whistled, the driver signalled, the train started.

"Good-bye, my darling !"

"Good-bye, papa !"

Comic as the whole scene was, its conclu-

At a Wayside Station

sion was a relief. One felt that if "Good-bye, my darling," had been repeated a hundred times, "Good-bye, papa," would have been sprung out in response with the same prompt, pleasant inflection, the same bright, ridiculous, mechanical precision.

She tripped, with the vivacity of coquettish maidenhood, for a few paces along the platform beside the carriage window, stood still a moment, watching the carriages as they swept round the curve, and then, resuming her air of unapproachable reserve, ascended the station steps.

The reaction was as sudden as it was unexpected. The ripple of her white muslin dress had scarcely vanished before I felt both ashamed and sorry that I had been so much amused. The whole situation assumed a different aspect, and I acknowledged with remorse that I had been a cruel and despicable onlooker. The humor of the incident had mastered me; the pathos of it now stared me in the face.

As I thought of her unpleasing colour, of her ineligible uncomeliness, of her five and thirty unmarried years, I wondered how

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I could have ever had the heart to laugh at what might well have been a cause for tears.

The pity of it ! That sweet fresh voice — and it *was* singularly sweet and fresh — seemed the one charm left of the years of a woman's charms and a woman's chances. The harmless prim ways and little coy tricks of manner, so old-fashioned and out of place, seemed to belong to the epoch of powder and patches. They were irrefutable evidence of the seclusion in which she had lived — of the little world of home which had never been invaded by any rash, handsome, self-confident young man.

As I thought of the garrulous pride and affection of her father, I knew that she must be womanly and lovable in a thousand ways which a stranger could not guess at. If no one else in the world had any need of her, she was at least *his* darling ; but, ah ! the pity of the unfulfilled mission, of the beautiful possibilities unrealised, of the honour and holiness of motherhood denied. She would never have any little being to call "*her* darling," to rear in love and sorrow, in solicitude and joy ; never one even to lose

At a Wayside Station

“When God draws a new angel so
Through a house of a man up to His,”

—to lose and yet know it is not lost, to surrender and yet feel it is safe for ever ; preserved beyond change and the estrangement of the years and the sad transformations of temperament—a sinless babe for evermore.

“Good-bye, my darling ! ”

How strangely, how tranquilly, with what little sense of change must the years have gone by for father and daughter ! One could not but conjecture whether he saw her now as she actually appeared in my eyes, or whether she was still to him the small, inexpressibly lovely creature of thirty years ago. Love plays curious tricks with our senses. No man ever yet married an ugly woman, and time is slow to wrinkle a beloved face. To him, doubtless, she was yet a child, and at forty or fifty she would be a child still.

Then I thought of her as an infant in her cradle, and I saw the faded, reserved woman and the florid little man, a youthful couple, leaning over it, full of the happiness and wonder that come with the first baby. I thought of the endearing helplessness of

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those early weeks ; of the anguish of the first baby troubles ; of the scares and terrors, of the prayers and thankfulness ; of the delight in the first smile ; of the blissful delusions that their little angel had begun to notice, that she had tried to speak, that she had recognised some one ; of the inexplicable brightness which made their home, the rooms, the garden, the very street seem a bit of heaven which had fallen to earth ; of the foolish father buying the little one toys, perhaps even a book, which she would not be able to handle for many a day to come ; of the more practical mother who exhausted her ingenuity in hoods and frocks, bootees, and dainty vanities of lace and ribbon.

I thought of the little woman when she first began to toddle ; of her resolute efforts to carry weights almost as heavy as herself ; of her inarticulate volubility ; of the marvellous growth of intelligence — the quickness to understand, associated with the inability to express herself ; of her indefatigable imitative faculty ; and of the delight of her father in all these.

Then, as years went by, I saw how she

At a Wayside Station

had become essential to his happiness, how all his thoughts encompassed her, how she influenced him, how much better a man she made him ; and as still the years elapsed, I took into account her ambitions, her day-dreams, her outlook into the world of men and women, and I wondered whether she too had her half-completed romance, of which, perchance, no one, not even her father, had an inkling. How near they were to each other ; and yet, after all, how far apart in many things they might still be !

Her father's darling ! Just Heaven ! if we have to give account of every foolish word, for how much senseless and cruel laughter shall we have to make reckoning ? For, as I let my thoughts drift to and fro about these matters, I remembered the thousands who have many children but no darling ; the mothers whose hearts have been broken, the fathers whose grey hairs have been brought down in sorrow to the grave ; and I mused on those in whom faith and hope have been kept alive by prayer and the merciful recollection of a never-to-be-forgotten childhood.

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When I reached home I took down the volume in which one of our poets¹ has spoken in tenderest pathos of these last in the beautiful verses entitled —

TWO SONS

I have two sons, Wife —
Two and yet the same;
One his wild way runs, Wife,
Bringing us to shame.
The one is bearded, sunburnt, grim, and fights
across the sea;
The other is a little child who sits upon your
knee.

One is fierce and bold, Wife,
As the wayward deep,
Him no arms could hold, Wife,
Him no breast could keep.
He has tried our hearts for many a year, not
broken them; for he
Is still the sinless little one that sits upon your
knee.

One may fall in fight, Wife —
Is he not our son?
Pray with all your might, Wife,
For the wayward one;

¹ Robert Buchanan.

At a Wayside Station

Pray for the dark, rough soldier who fights across
the sea,
Because you love the little shade who smiles upon
your knee.

One across the foam, Wife,
As I speak may fall;
But this one at home, Wife,
Cannot die at all.

They both are only one, and how thankful should
we be
We cannot lose the darling son who sits upon your
knee.

This one cannot die at all! To how
many has this bright little shadow of the
vanished years been an enduring solace and
an undying hope! And if God's love be no
less than that of an earthly father, what
mercies, what long-suffering, what infinite
pity may we grown-up, wilful and wayward
children not owe to His loving memory of
our sinless infancy! But for those happy
parents who, as the years have gone by,
have never failed to see the "sinless little
one," now in the girl or boy, now in the
young man or maiden, and now in these no
longer young but still darlings, what a gra-

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cious providence has encompassed their lives !

When I had smiled in witless amusement I had not thought of all this ; and even now it had not occurred to me that this could have been no rare and exceptional case — that there must be many such darlings in the world. That same evening, however, as I glanced over the paper, I came across the following notice in the column of " Births, Deaths, and Marriages " :

" In memoriam, Louisa S——, who died suddenly on August 22, aged 40 ; my youngest, most beloved, and affectionate daughter."

W. V. HER BOOK

HER BIRTHDAY



Her way of "playing at botany"

HER BIRTHDAY

WE are still on the rosy side of the apple ; but this is the last Saturday in September, and we cannot expect many more golden days between this and the cry of the cuckoo. But what a summer we have had, thanks to one of W. V.'s ingenious suggestions ! She came to us in April, when the world is still a trifle bare and the wind somewhat too bleak for any one to get comfortably lost in the Forest or cast up on a coral reef ; so we have made her birthday a movable feast, and whenever a fine free Saturday comes round we devote it to thankfulness that she has been born, and to the joy of our both being alive together.

W. V. sleeps in an eastern room, and accordingly the sun rises on that side of the house. Under the eaves and just above her

W. V.

window the martins have a nest plastered against the wall, and their chattering awakens her in the first freshness of the new morning. She watches the black shadows of the birds fluttering on the sunny blind, as, first one and then another, they race up to the nest, and vibrate in the air a moment before darting into it. When her interest has begun to flag, she steals in to me in her nightdress, and tugs gently at my beard till I waken and sit up. Unhappily her mother wakens too. "What, more birthdays!" she exclaims in a tone of stern disapproval; whereat W. V. and I laugh, for evasion of domestic law is the sweet marjoram of our salad. But it *is* possible to coax even a Draconian parent into assent, and oh!

Flower of the may,
If mamsie will not say her nay,
W. won't care what any one may say!

We first make a tour of the garden, and it is delightful to observe W. V. prying about with happy, eager eyes, to detect whether nature has been making any new thing during the dim, starry hours when people are too

Her Birthday

sound asleep to notice ; delightful to hear her little screams of ecstasy when she has discovered something she has not seen before. It is singular how keenly she notes every fresh object, and in what quaint and pretty terms of phrase she expresses her glee and wonderment. " Oh, father, have n't the bushes got their hands quite full of flowers ? " " Are n't the buds the trees' little girls ? "

This morning the sun was blissfully warm, and the air seemed alive with the sparkle of the dew, which lay thick on every blade and leaf. As we went round the gravel walks we perceived how completely all the earlier flowers had vanished ; even the lovely sweet peas were almost over. We have still, however, the single dahlias, and marigolds, and nasturtiums, on whose level leaves the dew stood shining like globules of quicksilver ; and the tall Michaelmas daisies make quite a white-topped thicket along the paling, while the rowan-berries are burning in big red bunches over the western hedge.

In the corner near the limes we came upon a marvellous spectacle — a huge old

W. V.

spider hanging out in his web in the sun, like a grim old fisherman floating in the midst of his nets at sea. A hand's breadth off, young bees and new-born flies were busy with the low perennial sunflowers ; he watching them motionlessly, with his gruesome shadow silhouetted on a leaf hard by. In his immediate neighbourhood the fine threads of his web were invisible, but a little distance away one could distinguish their concentric curves, grey on green. Every now and then we heard the snapping of a stalk overhead, and a leaf pattered down from the limes. Every now and then, too, slight *surges* of breeze ran shivering through the branches. Nothing distracted the intense vigilance of the crafty fisherman. Scores of glimmering insects grazed the deadly snare, but none touched it. It must have been tantalising, but the creature's sullen patience was invincible. W. V. at last dropped a piece of leaf-stalk on his web, out of curiosity. In a twinkling he was at the spot, and the fragment was dislodged with a single jerk.

This is one of the things in which she delights — the quiet observation of the ways

Her Birthday

of creatures. Nothing would please her better, could she but dwarf herself into an "aglet-baby," than to climb into those filmy meshes and have a chat in the sunshine with the wily ogre. She has no mistrust, she feels no repulsion from anything that has life. There is a warm place in her heart for the cool, dry toad, and she loves the horned snail, if not for his own sake, at least for his "darling little house" and the silver track he leaves on the gravel.

Of course she wanted a story about a spider. I might have anticipated as much. Well, there was King Robert the Bruce, who was saved by a spider from his enemies when they were seeking his life.

"And if they had found him, would they have sworded off his head? Really, father? Like Oliver Crumball did Charles King's?"

Her grammar was defective, but her surmises were beyond dispute; they would. Then there was the story of Sir Samuel Brown, who took his idea of a suspension bridge from a web which hung—but W. V. wanted something much more engrossing.

W. V.

"Was n't there never no awful big spider that made webs in the Forest?"

"And caught lions and bears?"

She nodded approvingly. Oh, yes, there was — once upon a time.

"And was there a little girl there?"

There must have been for the story to be worth telling; but the breakfast bell broke in on the opening chapter of that little girl's incredible adventures.

After breakfast we followed the old birthday custom, and "plunged" into the depths of the Forest. Some persons, I have heard, call our Forest the "East Woods," and report that though they are pleasant enough in summer, they are rather meagre and limited in area. Now, it is obvious that it would be impossible to "plunge" into anything less than a forest. Certainly, when W. V. is with me I am conscious of the Forest — the haunted, enchanted, aboriginal Forest; and I see with something of her illumined vision, the vision of W. V., who can double for herself the comfort of a fire on a chilly day by running into the next room

Her Birthday

and returning with the tidings, "It's *very* cold in the woods!"

If you are courageous enough to leave the paths and hazard yourself among the under-wood and the litter of bygone autumns, twenty paces will take you to the small Gothic doors of the Oak-men; twenty more to the cavern of the Great Bruin and the pollard tree on the top of which the foxes live; while yet another twenty, and you are at the burrows of the kindest of all insects, the leaf-cutter bees. Once — in parenthesis — when a little maid was weeping because she had lost her way at dusk in the Forest mazes, it was a leaf-cutter bee that tunnelled a straight line through the trees, so that the nearest road lamp, miles away, twinkled right into the Forest, and she was able to guide herself home. Indeed, it will only take ten minutes, if you do not dawdle, to get to the dreadful webs of the Iron Spider, and when you do reach that spot, the wisest thing you can do is to follow the example of the tiny flame-elf when a match is blown out — clap on your cap of darkness and scuttle back to fairyland.

W. V.

What magical memories have we two of the green huddle and the dreamy lawns of that ancient and illimitable Forest! We know the bosky dingles where we shall find pappa-trees, on whose lower branches a little girl may discover something to eat when she is good enough to deserve it. We know where certain green-clad foresters keep store of fruits which are supposed, by those who know no better, to grow only in orchards by tropical seas. Of course every one is aware that in the heart of the Forest there is a granite fountain; but only we two have learned the secret that its water is the Water of Heart's-ease, and that if we continue to drink it we shall never grow really old. We have still a great deal of the Forest to explore; we have never reached the glade where the dog-daisies have to be chained because they grow so exceedingly wild; nor have we found the blue thicket — it is blue because it is so distant — from which some of the stars come up into the dusk when it grows late; but when W. V. has got her galloping-horse-bicycle we shall start with the first sun-

Her Birthday

shine some morning, and give the whole day to the quest.

We lowly folk dine before most people think of lunching, and so dinner was ready when we arrived home. Now, as decorum at table is one of the cardinal virtues W. V. dines by proxy. It is her charming young friend Gladys who gives us the pleasure of her company. It is strange how many things this bewildering daughter of mine can do as Gladys, which she cannot possibly accomplish as W. V. W. V. is unruly, a chatter-box, careless, or at least forgetful, of the elegances of the social board; whereas Gladys is a model of manners, an angel in a bib. W. V. cannot eat crusts, and rebels against porridge at breakfast; Gladys idolises crusts, and as for porridge — “I *am* surprised your little girl does not like porridge. It is *so* good for her.”

After dinner, as I lay smoking in the garden lounge to-day, I fell a-thinking of W. V. and Gladys, and the numerous other little maids in whom this tricky sprite has been

W. V.

masquerading since she came into the world five years ago. She began the small comedy before she had well learned to balance herself on her feet. As she sat in the middle of the carpet we would play at looking for the baby—where has the baby gone? have *you* seen the baby?—and, oddly enough, she would take a part and pretend to wonder, or perhaps actually did wonder, what had become of herself, till at last we would discover her on the floor—to her own astonishment and irrepressible delight.

Then, as she grew older, it was amusing to observe how she would drive away the naughty self, turn it literally out of doors, and return as the “Smiling Winifred.” I presume she grew weary, as human nature is apt to grow, of a face which is wreathed in amaranthine smiles; so the Smiling Winifred vanished, and we were visited by various sweet children with lovely names, of whom Gladys is the latest and the most indefatigable. I cannot help laughing when I recall my three-year-old rebel listening for a few moments to a scolding, and when she considered that the ends of justice had been

Her Birthday

served, exclaiming, "I put my eyes down!" — which meant that so far as she was concerned the episode was now definitively closed.

My day-dream was broken by W. V. flying up to me with fern fronds fastened to her shoulders for wings. She fluttered round me, then flopped into my lap, and put her arms about my neck. "If I was a real swan, father, I would cuddle your head with my wings."

"Ah, well, you are a real duck, Diddles, and that will do quite as well."

She was thinking of that tender Irish legend of the Children of Lir, changed into swans by their step-mother and doomed to suffer heat and cold, tempest and hunger, homelessness and sorrow, for nine hundred years, till the sound of the first Christian bell changed them again — to frail, aged mortals. It was always the sister, she knows, who solaced and strengthened the brothers beside the terrible sea of Moyle, sheltering them under her wings and warming them against her bosom. In such a case

W. V.

as this an only child is at a disadvantage. Even M'rao, her furry playmate, might have served as a bewitched brother, but after many months of somnolent forbearance M'rao ventured into the great world beyond our limes, and returned no more.

Flower of the quince,
Puss once kissed Babs, and ever since
She thinks he *must* be an enchanted prince.

In a moment she was off again, an angel, flying about the garden and in and out of the house in the performance of helpful offices for some one ; or, perchance, a fairy, for her heaven is a vague and strangely-peopled region. Long ago she told me that the moon was "put up" by a black man—a saying which puzzled me until I came to understand that this negro divinity could only have been the "divine Dark" of the old Greek poet. Of course she says her brief, simple prayers ; but how can one convey to a child's mind any but the most provisional and elemental conceptions of the Invisible? Once I was telling her the story of a wicked king, who put his trust in a fort

Her Birthday

of stone on a mountain peak, and scoffed at a prophet God had sent to warn him. "He was n't very wise," said W. V., "for God and Jesus and the angels and the fairies are cleverer 'n we are; they have wings." The "cleverness" of God has deeply impressed her. He can make rain and see through walls. She noticed some stone crosses in a sculptor's yard some time ago, and remarked: "Jesus was put on one of those;" then, after some reflection: "Who was it put Jesus on the cross? Was it the church people, father?" Well, when one comes to think of it, it was precisely the church people — "not these church people, dear, but the church people of hundreds of years ago, when Jesus was alive." She had seen the world's tragedy in the stained glass windows and had drawn her own conclusion — the people who crucified would be the most likely to make a picture of the crucifixion; Christ's friends would want to forget it and never to speak of it.

In the main she does not much concern herself with theology or the unseen. She lives in the senses. Once, indeed, she

W. V.

began to communicate some interesting reminiscences of what had happened "before she came here," to this planet; but something interrupted her, and she has not attempted any further revelation. There is nothing more puzzling in the world to her, I fancy, than an echo. She has forgotten that her own face in the mirror was quite as bewildering. A high wind at night is not a pleasant fellow to have shaking your window and muttering down your chimney; but an intrepid father with a yard of brown oak is more than a match for *him*. Thunder and lightning she regards as "great friends; they always come together." She is more perceptive of their companionship than of their air of menace towards mankind. Darkness, unless it be on the staircase, does not trouble her: when we have said good-night out goes the gas. But there seems to be some quality or influence in the darkness which makes her affectionate and considerate. Once and again when she has slept with me and wakened in the dead of night she has been most apologetic and self-abasing. She is so sorry to disturb me, she knows she is a

Her Birthday

bother, but *would* I give her a biscuit or a drink of water?

She has all along been a curious combination of tenderness and savagery. In a sudden fit of motherhood she will bring me her dolly to kiss, and ten minutes later I shall see it lying undressed and abandoned in a corner of the room. She is a Spartan parent, and slight is the chance of her children being spoiled either by sparing the rod or lack of stern monition. It is not so long ago that we heard a curious sound of distress in the dining-room, and on her mother hurrying downstairs to see what was amiss, there was W. V. chastising her recalcitrant babe—and doing the weeping herself. This appeared to be a good opportunity for pointing a moral. It was clear now that she knew what it was to be naughty and disobedient, and if she punished these faults so severely in her own children she must expect me to deal with her manifold and grievous offences in the same way. She looked very much sobered and concerned, but a few moments later she brought me a stout oak walking-stick: “Would that do,

W. V.

father?" She shows deep commiseration for the poor *and* old ; grey hairs and penury are sad bed-fellows ; but for the poor who are not old I fear she feels little sympathy. Perhaps we, or the conditions of life, are to blame for this limitation of feeling, for when we spoke to her of certain poor little girls with no mothers, she rejoined : " Why don't you take them, then ? " Our compassion which stopped short of so simple a remedy must have seemed suspiciously like a pretence.

To me one of the chief wonders of childhood has been the manner in which this young person has picked up words, has learned to apply them, has coined them for herself, and has managed to equip herself with a stock of quotations. When she was yet little more than two and a half she applied of her own accord the name Dapple-grey to her first wooden horse. Then Dapple-grey was pressed into guardianship of her sleeping dolls, with this stimulative quotation : " Brave dog, watching by the baby's bed." There was some vacillation, I recollect, as to whether it was a laburnum or

Her Birthday

a St. Bernard that saved travellers in the snow, but that was exceptional. The word "twins" she adapted prettily enough. Trying once in an emotional moment to put her love for me into terms of gold currency, she added: "And I love mother just the same; you two are twins, you know." A little while after the University boat-race she drew my attention to a doll in a shop-window: "Isn't it beautiful? And look at its Oxford eyes!" To "fussle one," to disturb one by making a fuss, seems at once fresh and useful; "sorefully" is an acutely expressive adverb; when you have to pick your steps in wet weather the road may be conveniently described as "picky;" don't put wild roses on the cloth at dinner lest the maid should "crumb" them away; and when one has a cold in the head how can one describe the condition of one's nose except as "hoarse"? "Lost in sad thought," "Now I have something to my heart's content," "Few tears are my portion," are among the story-book phrases which she has assimilated for week-day use. When she was being read to out of Kingsley's "Heroes," she asked her

W. V.

mother to substitute "the Ladies" for "the Gorgons." She did not like the *sound* of the word; "it makes me," drawing her breath with a sort of shiver through her teeth, "it makes me pull myself together." Once when she broke into a sudden laugh, for sheer glee of living I suppose, she explained: "I am just like a little squirrel biting myself." Her use of the word "live" is essential poetry; the spark "lives" inside the flint, the catkins "live" in the Forest; and she pointed out to me the "lines" down a horse's legs where the blood "lives." A sign-board on a piece of waste land caused her some perplexity. It was not "The public are requested" this time, but "Forbidden to shoot rubbish here." Either big game or small deer she could have understood; but — "Who *wants* to shoot rubbish, father?"

Have I sailed out of the trades into the doldrums in telling of this commonplace little body? — for, after all, she is merely the average, healthy, merry, teasing, delightful mite who tries to take the whole of life at once into her two diminutive hands. Ah,

Her Birthday

well, I want some record of these good, gay days of our early companionship ; something that may still survive when this right hand is dust ; a testimony that there lived at least one man who was joyously content with the small mercies which came to him in the beaten way of nature. For neither of us, little woman, can these childish, hilarious days last much longer now. Five arch, happy faces look out at me from the sections of an oblong frame ; all W. V.'s, but no two the same W. V. The sixth must go into another frame. You must say good-bye to the enchanted Forest, little lass, and travel into strange lands ; and the laws of infancy are harder than the laws of old Wales. For these ordained that when a person remained in a far country under such conditions that he could not freely revisit his own, his title to the ancestral soil was not extinguished till the ninth man ; the ninth man could utter his "cry over the abyss," and save his portion. But when you have gone into the world beyond, and can no more revisit the Forest freely, no ear will ever listen to your "cry over the abyss."

W. V.

When she had at last tired herself with angelic visits and thrown aside her fern wings, she returned to me and wanted to know if I would play at shop. No, I would not play at shop; I would be neither purchaser nor proprietor, the lady she called "Cash" nor the stately gentleman she called "Sign." Would I be a king, then, and refuse my daughter to her (she would be a prince) unless she built a castle in a single night; "better'n't" she bring her box of bricks and the dominoes? No, like Cæsar, I put by the crown. She took my refusals cheerfully. On the whole, she is tractable in these matters. "Fathers," she once told me, "know better than little girls, don't they?" "Oh, dear, no! how could they? Fathers have to go into the city; they don't go to school like little girls." Doubtless there *was* something in that, but she persisted, "Well, even if little girls do go to school, fathers are wiser and know best." From which one father at least may derive encouragement. Well, would I blow soap-bubbles?

I think it was the flying thistledown in

Her Birthday

June which first gave us the cue of the soap-bubbles. What a delightful game it is ; and there is a knack, too, in blowing these spheres of fairy glass and setting them off on their airy flight. Till you have blown bubbles you have no conception how full of waywardness and freakish currents the air is.

Oh, you who are sad at heart, or weary of thought, or irritable with physical pain, coax, beg, borrow, or steal a four or five year old, and betake you to blowing bubbles in the sunshine of your recluse garden. Let the breeze be just a little brisk to set your bubbles drifting. Fill some of them with tobacco smoke, and with the wind's help bombard the old fisherman in his web. As the opaline globes break and the smoke escapes in a white puff along the grass or among the leaves, you shall think of historic battlefields, and muse whether the greater game was not quite as childish as this, and "sorefully" less innocent. The smoke-charges are only a diversion ; it is the crystal balls which delight most. The colours of all the gems in the world run molten through their fragile films. And what visions they

W. V.

contain for crystal-gazers ! Among the gold and green, the rose and blue, you see the dwarfed reflection of your own trees and your own home floating up into the sunshine. These are your possessions, your surroundings — so lovely, so fairylike in the bubble ; in reality so prosaic and so inadequate when one considers the rent and rates. To W. V. the bubbles are like the wine of the poet — “full of strange continents and new discoveries.”

Flower of the sloe,
When chance annuls the worlds we blow,
Where does the soul of beauty in them go ?

“Tell me a story of a little girl who lived in a bubble,” she asked when she had tired of creating fresh microcosms.

I lifted her on to my knee, and as she settled herself comfortably she drew my right arm across her breast and began to nurse it.

“Well, once upon a time —— ”

HER BOOK

THE INQUISITION

I WOKE at dead of night ;
The room was still as death ;
All in the dark I saw a sight
Which made me catch my breath.

Although she slumbered near,
The silence hung so deep
I leaned above her crib to hear
If it were death or sleep.

W. V.

As low — all quick — I leant,
Two large eyes thrust me back ;
Dark eyes — too wise — which gazed intent ;
Blue eyes transformed to black.

Heavens ! how those steadfast eyes
Their eerie vigil kept !
Was this some angel in disguise
Who searched us while we slept ;

Who winnow'd every sin,
Who tracked each slip and fall,
One of God's spies — not Babbykin,
Not Babbykin at all ?

Day came with golden air ;
She caught the beams and smiled ;
No masked inquisitor was there,
Only a babbling child !

THE FIRST MIRACLE

THE huge weeds bent to let her pass,
And sometimes she crept under ;
She plunged through gulfs of flowery grass ;
She filled both hands with plunder.

The buttercups grew tall as she,
Taller the big dog-daisies ;
And so she lost herself, you see,
Deep in the jungle mazes.

W. V.

A wasp twang'd by ; a hornèd snail
Leered from a great-leafed docken ;
She shut her eyes, she raised a wail
Deplorable, heart-broken.

“ Mamma ! ” Two arms, flashed out of space
Miraculously, caught her ;
Fond mouth was pressed to tearful face —
“ What *is* it, little daughter ? ”

BY THE FIRESIDE

I

RED-BOSOMED Robin, in the hard
white weather
She marks thee light upon the ice to rest ;
She sees the wintry glass glow with thy
breast
And let thee warm thy feet at thine own
feather.

BY THE FIRESIDE

II

IN the April sun at baby-house she plays.
Her rooms are traced with stones and
bits of bricks ;
For warmth she lays a hearth with little
sticks;
And one bright crocus makes a merry
blaze !

THE RAIDER

HER happy, wondering eyes had ne'er
Till now ranged summer meadows
o'er :

She would keep stopping everywhere
To fill with flowers her pinafore.

But when she saw how, green and wide,
Field followed field, and each was gay
With endless flowers, she laughed — then
sighed,
“No use !” and threw her spoils away.

BABSIE-BIRD

IN the orchard blithely waking,
Through the blossom, loud and clear,
Pipes the goldfinch, " Day is breaking ;
Waken, Babsie ; May is here !
Bloom is laughing ; lambs are leaping ;
Every new green leaflet sings ;
Five chipp'd eggs will soon be cheeping ;
God be praised for song and wings ! "

Her Book

Warm and ruddy as an ember,
 Lilting sweet from bush to stone,
On the moor in chill November
 Flits the stone-chat all alone :
“ Snow will soon drift up the heather ;
 Days are short, nights cold and long ;
Meanwhile in this glinting weather
 God be thanked for wings and song ! ”

Round from Maytime to November
 Babsie lilts upon the wing,
Far too happy to remember
 Thanks or praise for anything ;
Save at bedtime, laughing sinner,
 When she gaily lisps along,
For the wings and song within her —
 “ Thank you, God, for wings and song ! ”

THE ORCHARD OF STARS

A MID the orchard grass she 'd stood
and watch'd with childish glee
The big bright burning apples shower'd
like star-falls from the tree ;

So when the autumn meteors fell
she cried, with outspread gown,
" Oh my, papa, look ! Is n't God
just shaking apples down ? "

THE SWEET PEA

OH, what has been born in the night
To bask in this blithe summer morn?
She peers, in a dream of delight,
For something new-made or new-born.

Not spider-webs under the tree,
Not swifts in their cradle of mud,
But — “Look, father, Sweet Mrs. Pea
Has two little babies in bud !”

BROOK-SIDE LOGIC

AS the brook caught the blossoms she
cast,

Such a wonder gazed out from her face !
Why, the water was all running past,
Yet the brook never budged from its place.

Oh, the magic of what was so clear !
I explained. And enlightened her?
Nay —

“Why but, father, I *could n't* stay here
If I always was running away !”

BUBBLE-BLOWING

OUR plot is small, but sunny limes
Shut out all cares and troubles ;
And there my little girl at times
And I sit blowing bubbles.

The screaming swifts race to and fro,
Bees cross the ivied paling,
Draughts lift and set the globes we blow
In freakish currents sailing.

W. V.

They glide, they dart, they soar, they break.
Oh, joyous little daughter,
What lovely coloured worlds we make,
What crystal flowers of water !

One, green and rosy, slowly drops ;
One soars and shines a minute,
And carries to the lime-tree tops
Our home, reflected in it.

The gable, with cream rose in bloom,
She sees from roof to basement ;
“ Oh, father, there 's your little room ! ”
She cries in glad amazement.

To her enchanted with the gleam,
The glamour and the glory,
The bubble home 's a home of dream,
And I must tell its story ;

Tell what we did, and how we played,
Withdrawn from care and trouble —
A father and his merry maid,
Whose house was in a bubble !

NEW VERSION OF AN OLD GAME

THE storm had left the rain-butt brim-
ming ;

A dahlia leaned across the brink ;
Its mirrored self, beneath it swimming,
Lit the dark water, gold and pink.

Oh, rain, far fallen from heights of azure —
Pure rain, from heavens so cold and
lone —

Dost thou not feel, and thrill with pleasure
To feel a flower's heart in thine own ?

Enjoy thy beauty, and bestow it,
Fair dahlia, fenced from harm, mishap !
“ See, Babs, this flower — and this below
it.”

She looked, and screamed in rapture —
“ Snap ! ”

THE GOLDEN SWING-BOAT

A CROSS the low dim fields we caught
Faint music from a distant band —
So sweet i' the dusk one might have thought
It floated up from elfin-land.

Then, o'er the tree-tops' hazy blue
We saw the new moon, low i' the air :
"Look, Dad," she cried, "a shuggy-shue !
Why, this must be a fairies' fair !"

ANOTHER NEWTON'S APPLE

WE tried to show with lamp and ball
How simply day and night were
"made ; "

How earth revolved, and how through all
One half was sunshine, one was shade.

One side, tho' turned and turned again,
Was always bright. She mused and frowned,
Then flashed — " It 's just an apple, then,
'at 's always rosy half way round ! "

Oh, boundless tree of ranging blue,
Star-fruited through thy heavenly leaves,
Be, if thou canst be, good unto
This apple-loving babe of Eve's.

NATURULA NATURANS

BESIDE the water and the crumbs
She laid her little birds of clay,
For — “When some other sparrow comes
Perhaps they ’ll fly away.”

Ah, golden dream, to clothe with wings
A heart of springing joy ; to know
Two lives i’ the happy sum of things
To her their bliss will owe !

Day dawned ; they had not taken flight,
Tho’ playmates called from bush and tree.
She sighed : “ I hardly thought they might.
Well, — God ’s more clever ’n me ! ”

WINGS AND HANDS

GOD'S angels, dear, have six great wings
Of silver and of gold ;
Two round their heads, two round their
hearts,
Two round their feet they fold.

The angel of a man I know
Has just two hands — so small !
But they 're more strong than six gold wings
To keep him from a fall.

FLOWERS INVISIBLE

SHE'D watched the rose-trees, how they
grew
With green hands full of flowers ;
Such flowers made *their* hands sweet, she
knew,
But tenderness made ours.

So now, o'er fevered brow and eyes
Two small cold palms she closes.
“ Thanks, darling ! ” “ Oh, mamma,” she
cries,
“ Are *my* hands full of roses ? ”

MAKING PANSIES

“**T**HREE faces in a hood.”
Folk called the pansy so
Three hundred years ago.
Of course she understood !

Then, perching on my knee,
She drew her mother's head
To her own and mine, and said —
“That 's mother, you, and me !”

And so it comes about
We three, for gladness' sake,
Sometimes a pansy make
Before the gas goes out.

HEART-EASE

LAST June — how slight a thing to tell ! —
One straggling leaf beneath the limes
Against the sunset rose and fell,
Making a rhythm with coloured rhymes.

No other leaf in all the air
Seemed waking ; and my little maid
Watched with me, from the garden-chair,
Its rhythmic play of light and shade.

Now glassy gold, now greenish grey,
It dropped, it lifted. That was all.
Strange I should still feel glad to-day
To have seen that one leaf lift and fall.

“SI J'AVAIS UN ARPENT”

OH, had I but a plot of earth, on plain
or vale or hill,
With running water babbling through, in
torrent, spring, or rill,

I'd plant a tree, an olive or an oak or willow
tree,
And build a roof of thatch, or tile, or reed,
for mine and me.

W. V.

Upon my tree a nest of moss, or down, or
wool, should hold
A songster — finch or thrush or blackbird
with its bill of gold ;

Beneath my roof a child, with brown or
blond or chestnut hair,
Should find in hammock, cradle or crib a
nest, and slumber there.

I ask for but a little plot ; to measure my
domain,
I 'd say to Babs, my bairn of bliss, " Go,
alderliefest wean,

" And stand against the rising sun ; your
shadow on the grass
Shall trace the limits of my world ; beyond I
shall not pass.

" The happiness one can't attain is dream
and glamour-shine ! "

These rhymes are Soulary's ; the thoughts
are Babs's thoughts and mine.

HER FRIEND LITTLEJOHN

HER FRIEND LITTLEJOHN

THE first time Littlejohn saw W. V. — a year or so ago — she was sitting on the edge of a big red flower-pot, into which she had managed to pack herself. A brilliant Japanese sunshade was tilted over her shoulder, and close by stood a large green watering-can. This was her way of “playing at botany,” but as the old gardener could not be prevailed upon to water her, there was not as much fun in the game as there ought to have been.

W. V. was accordingly consoling herself with telling “Mr. Sandy” — the recalcitrant gardener — the authentic and incredible story of the little girl who was “just ’scruciatingly good.”

Later, on an idyllic afternoon among the heather, Littlejohn heard all about that excel-

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lent and too precipitate child, who was so eager to oblige or obey that she rushed off before she could be told what to do ; and as this was the only story W. V. knew which had obviously a moral, W. V. made it a great point to explain that "little girls ought not to be too good ; *if — they — only — did — what — they — were — told* they would be good enough."

W. V.'s mother had been taken seriously ill a few weeks before, and as a house of sickness is not the best place for a small child, nor a small child the most soothing presence in a patient's room, W. V. had undertaken a marvellous and what seemed an interminable journey into the West Highlands. Her host and hostess were delighted with her and her odd sayings and quaint, fanciful ways ; and she, in the plenitude of her good-nature, extended a cheerful patronage to the grown-up people. Littlejohn had no children of his own, and it was a novel delight, full of charming surprises, to have a sturdy, imperious, sunny-hearted little body of four and a half as his constant companion. The child was pretty enough, but it was the alert, excitable little

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soul of her which peered and laughed out of her blue eyes that took him captive.

Like most healthy children, W. V. did not understand what sorrow, sickness, or death meant. Indeed it is told of her that she once exclaimed gleefully, "Oh, see, here's a funeral! Which is the bride?" The absence of her mother did not weigh upon her. Once she awoke at night and cried for her; and on one or two occasions, in a sentimental mood, she sighed "*I should* like to see my father! Don't you think we could 'run over'?" The immediate present, its fun and nonsense and grave responsibilities, absorbed all her energies and attention; and what a divine dispensation it is that we who never forget can be forgotten so easily.

I fancy, from what I have heard, that she must have regarded Littlejohn's ignorance of the ways of children as one of her responsibilities. It was really very deplorable to find a great-statured, ruddy-bearded fellow of two-and-thirty so absolutely wanting in tact, so incapable of "pretending," so destitute of the capacity of rhyming or of telling

W. V.

a story. The way she took him in hand was kindly yet resolute. It began with her banging her head against something and howling. "Don't cry, dear," Littlejohn had entreated, with the crude pathos of an amateur; "come, don't cry."

When W. V. had heard enough of this she looked at him disapprovingly, and said, "You should n't say that. You should just laugh and say, 'Come, let me kiss that crystal tear away!'" "Say it!" she added after a pause. This was Littlejohn's first lesson in the airy art of consolation.

Littlejohn as a lyric poet was a melancholy spectacle.

"Now, *you* say, 'Come, let us go,'" W. V. would command.

"I don't know it, dear."

"I'll say half for you —"

"Come, let us go where the people sell —"

But Littlejohn had n't the slightest notion of what they sold.

"Bananas," W. V. prompted; "say it."

"Bananas."

"And what?"

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"Oranges?" Littlejohn hazarded.

"Pears!" cried W. V. reproachfully;
"say it!"

"Pears."

"And ——" with pauses to give her host
chances of retrieving his honour; "pine —
ap—pèl! —

'Bananas and pears and pine-appèl,'

of course. I don't think you *can* publish a
poem."

"I don't think I can, dear," Littlejohn
confessed after a roar of laughter.

"Papa and I published that poem. Pine-
appèl made me laugh at first. And after
that you say —

'Away to the market! and let us buy
A sparrow to make asparagus pie.'

Say it!"

So in time Littlejohn found his memory
becoming rapidly stocked with all sorts of
nonsensical rhymes and ridiculous pronun-
ciations.

Inability to rhyme, like inability to reason,
is a gift of nature, and one can overlook it,

W. V.

but Littlejohn's sheer imbecility in face of the demand for a story was a sore trial to W. V. After an impatient lesson or two, the way in which he picked up a substitute for imagination was really exceedingly creditable. Having spent a day in the "Forest" — W. V. could pack some of her forests in a nutshell, and feel herself a woodlander of infinite verdure — Littlejohn learned which trees were "pappa-trees"; how to knock and ask if any one was in; how to make the dog inside bark if there was no one; how to get an answer in the affirmative if he asked whether they could give his little girl a biscuit, or a pear, or a plum; how to discover the fork in the branches where the gift would be found, and how to present it to W. V. with an air of inexhaustible surprise and delight. Every Forest is full of "pappa-trees," as every verderer knows; the *crux* of the situation presents itself when the tenant of the tree is cross, or the barking dog intimates that he has gone "to the City."

Now, about a mile from Cloan Den, Littlejohn's house, there was a bit of the real "old ancient" Caledonian Forest. There

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was not much timber, it is true, but still enough ; and occasionally one came across a shattered shell of oak, which might have been a pillar of cloudy foliage in the days when woad was the fashionable dress material. I have reason to believe that W. V. invested all that wild region with a rosy atmosphere of romance for Littlejohn. Every blade of grass and fringe of larch was alive with wood-magic. She trotted about with him holding his hand, or swinging on before him with her broad boyish shoulders thrown well back and an air of unconscious proprietorship of man and nature.

It was curious to note how her father's stories had taken hold of her, and Littlejohn, with some surprise at himself and at the nature of things at large, began to fancy he saw motive and purpose in some of these fantastic narratives. The legend of the girl that was "just 'scruciatingly good" had evidently been intended to correct a possible tendency towards priggishness. The boy whose abnormal badness expressed itself in "I don't care" could not have been so irredeemably wicked, or he would never have

W. V.

succeeded in locking the bear and tiger up in the tree and leaving them there to dine off each other. And all the stories about little girls who got lost — there were several of these — were evidently lessons against fright and incentives to courage and self-confidence.

W. V. quite believed that if a little girl got bewildered in the underwood the grass would whisper "This way, this way!" or some little furry creature would look up at her with its sharp beady eyes and tell her to follow. Even though one were hungry and thirsty as well as lost, there was nothing to be afraid of, if there were only oaks in the Forest. For when once on a time a little girl — whose name, strangely enough, was W. V. — got lost and began to cry, did not the door of an oak-tree open and a little, little, wee man all dressed in green, with green boots and a green feather in his cap, come out and ask her to "step inside," and have some fruit and milk? And did n't he say, "When you get lost, don't keep going this way and going that way and going the other way, but *keep straight on and you are*

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sure to come out at the other side? Only poor wild things in cages at the Zoo keep going round and round."

And that is "truly and really," W. V. would add, "because I saw them doing it at the Zoo."

Even at the risk of being tedious, I must finish the story, for it was one that greatly delighted Littlejohn and haunted him in a pleasant fashion. Well, when this little girl who was lost had eaten the fruit and drunk the milk, she asked the wee green oak-man to go with her a little way, as it was growing dusk. And he said he would. Then he whistled, and close to, and then farther away, and still farther and farther, other little oak-men whistled in answer, till all the Forest was full of the sound of whistling. And the oak-man shouted, "Will you help this little girl out?" and you could hear "Yes, yes, yes, yes," far away right and left, to the very end of the Forest. And the oak-man walked a few yards with her, and pointed; and she saw another oak and another oak-man; and so she went on from one to another right through the Forest; and she said, "Thank

W. V.

you, Mr. Oak-man," to each of them, and bent down and gave each of them a kiss, and they all laughed because they were pleased, and when she got out she could still hear them laughing quietly together.

Another story that pleased Littlejohn hugely, and he liked W. V. to tell it as he lay in a hollow among the heather with his bonnet pulled down to the tip of his nose, was about the lost little girl who walked among the high grass — it was quite up to her eyes — till she was "tired to death." So she lay down, and just as she was beginning to doze off she heard a very soft voice humming her to sleep, and she felt warm soft arms snuggling her close to a warm breast. And as she was wondering who it could be that was so kind to her, the soft voice whispered, "It is only mother, dearie ; sleep-a-sleep, dearie ; only mother cuddling her little girl." And when she woke there was no one there, and she had been lying in quite a little grassy nest in the hollow of the ground.

Littlejohn himself could hardly credit the change which this voluble, piquant, imperious

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young person had made not only in the ways of the house, but in his very being and in the material landscape itself. One of the oddest and most incongruous things he ever did in his life was to measure W. V. against a tree and inscribe her initials (her father always called her by her initials and she liked that form of her name best), and his own, and the date, above the score which marked her height.

The late summer and the early autumn passed delightfully in this fashion. There was some talk at intervals of W. V. being packed, labelled, and despatched "with care" to her own woods and oak-men in the most pleasant suburb of the great metropolis, but it never came to anything. Her father was persuaded to spare her just a little longer. The patter of the little feet, the chatter of the voluble, cheery voice, had grown well-nigh indispensable to Littlejohn and his wife, for though I have confined myself to Littlejohn's side of the story, I would not have it supposed that W. V.'s charm did not radiate into other lives.

So the cold rain and the drifted leaf, the

W. V.

first frost and the first snow came ; and in their train come Christmas and the Christmas-tree and the joyful vision of Santa Claus.

Now to make a long story short, a polite note had arrived at Cloan Den asking for the pleasure of Miss W. V.'s company at Bargeddie Mains — about a mile and a half beyond the “ old ancient ” Caledonian Forest — where a Christmas-tree was to be despoiled of its fairy fruitage. The Bargeddie boys would drive over for Miss W. V. in the afternoon, and “ Uncle Big-John ” would perhaps come for the young lady in the evening, unless indeed he would change his mind and allow her to stay all night.

Uncle Big-John, of course, did not change his mind ; and about nine o'clock he reached the Mains. It was a sharp moonlight night, and the wide snowy strath sweeping away up to the vast snow-muffled Bens looked like a silvery expanse of fairyland. So far as I can gather it must have been well on the early side of ten when Littlejohn and W. V. (rejoicing in the spoils of the Christmas-tree) bade the Bargeddie people good-night and started homeward — the child warmly muf-

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fled, and chattering and laughing hilariously as she trotted along with her hand in his.

It has often since been a subject of wonder that Littlejohn did not notice the change of the weather, or that, having noticed it, he did not return for shelter to the Mains. But we are all too easily wise after the event, and it is to be remembered that the distance from home was little over three miles, and that Littlejohn was a perfect giant of a man.

They could have hardly been more than half a mile from Bargeddie when the snow storm began. The sparse big flakes thickened, the wind rose bitterly cold, and then, in a fierce smother of darkness, the moonlight was blotted out. For what follows the story depends principally on the recollections of W. V., and in a great measure on one's knowledge of Littlejohn's nature.

The biting cold and the violence of the wind soon exhausted the small traveller. Littlejohn took her in his arms, and wrapped her in his plaid. For some time they kept to the highroad, but the bitter weather suggested the advisability of taking a crow-line across the Forest.

W. V.

"You're a jolly heavy lumpumpibus, Infanta," Littlejohn said with a laugh; "I think we had better try a short cut for once through the old oaks."

When they got into some slight cover among the younger trees, Littlejohn paused to recover his breath. It was still blowing and snowing heavily.

"Now, W. V., I think it would be as well if you knocked up some of your little green oak-men, for the Lord be good to me if I know where we are."

"*You* must knock," said W. V., "but I don't think you will get any bananas."

W. V. says that Littlejohn did knock and that the bark of the dog showed that the oak-man was not at home!

"I rather thought he would not be, W. V.," said Littlejohn; "they never are at home except only to the little people. We big ones have to take care of ourselves."

"The oak-man said, 'Keep straight on, and you're sure to come out at the other side,'" W. V. reminded him.

"The oak-man spoke words of wisdom, Infanta," said Littlejohn. "Come along, W.

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V." And he lifted the child again in his arms. "Are you cold, my dearie-girl?"

"No, only my face ; but I am so sleepy."

"And so heavy, W. V. I did n't think a little girl *could* be so heavy. Come along, and let us try keeping straight on. The other side must be somewhere."

How long he trudged on with the child in his arms and the bewildering snow beating and clotting on them both will never be known. W. V., with a spread of his plaid over her face, fell into a fitful slumber, from which she was awakened by a fall and a scramble.

"You poor helpless bairn," he groaned, "have I hurt you?"

W. V. was not hurt ; the snow-wreath had been too deep for that.

"Well, you see, W. V., we came a lamentable cropper that time," said Littlejohn. "I think we must rest a little, for I'm fagged out. You see, W. V., there is no grass to whisper, 'This way, this way ;' and there are no furry things to say, 'Follow me ;' and the oak-men are all asleep ; and — and, God forgive me, I don't know what to do !"

W. V.

"Are you crying, Uncle Big-John?" asked W. V.; for "his voice sounded just like as if he was crying," she explained afterwards.

"Crying! no, my dear; there's no need to kiss the crystal tear away! But, you see, I'm tired, and it's jolly cold and dark; and, as Mother Earth is good to little children ——" He paused to see how he should be best able to make her understand. "You remember how that little girl that was lost went to sleep in a hollow of the grass and heard the Mother talking to her? Well, you must just lie snug like that, you see."

"But I'm not lost."

"Of course, you're not lost. Only you must lie snug and sleep till it stops snowing, and I'll sit beside you."

Littlejohn took off his plaid and his thick tweed jacket. He wrapped the child in the latter, and half covered her with snow. With the plaid, propped up with his stick, he made a sort of tent to shelter her from the driving flakes. He then lay down beside her till she fell asleep.

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"It's only mother, dearie ; mother cuddling her little girl ; sleep-a-sleep."

Then he must have arisen shuddering in his shirt-sleeves, and have lashed his arms again and again about his body for warmth.

In the hollow in which they were found, the snow-wreath, with the exception of a narrow passage a few feet in width where they had blundered in, was impassably deep on all sides. All round and round the hollow the snow was very much trampled.

Worn out with fatigue and exposure, the strong man had at last lain down beside the child. His hand was under his head.

In that desperate circular race against cold and death he must have been struck by his own resemblance to the wild creatures padding round and round in their cages in the Zoo, and what irony he must have felt in the counsel of the wee green oak-man. Well, he had followed the advice, had he not? And, when he awoke, would he not find that he *had come out at the other side?*

Hours afterwards, when at last Littlejohn slowly drifted back to consciousness, he lay

W. V.

staring for a moment or two with a dazed bewildered brain. Then into his eyes there flashed a look of horror, and he struggled to pull himself together. "My God, my God, where is the Infant?" he groaned.

W. V. was hurried into the room, obliviously radiant. With a huge sigh Littlejohn sank back smiling, and held out his hand to her. Whereupon W. V., moving it gently aside, went up close to him and spoke, half in inquiry half in remonstrance, "You 're *not* going to be died, are you?"

HER BED-TIME

HER BED-TIME

IN these winter evenings, thanks to the Great Northern, and to Hesperus who brings all things home, I reach my doorstep about half-an-hour before W. V.'s bedtime. A sturdy, rosy, flaxen-haired little body opens to my well-known knock, takes a kiss on the tip of her nose, seizes my umbrella, and makes a great show of assisting me with my heavy overcoat. She leads me into the dining-room, gets my slippers, runs my bootlaces into Gordian knots in her impetuous zeal, and announces that *she* has "set" the tea. At table she slips furtively on to my knee, and we are both happy till a severe voice, "Now, father!" reminds us of the reign of law in general, and of that law in particular which enacts that it is shocking in little girls to want everything they see,

W. V.

and most reprehensible in elderly people (I elderly!) to encourage them.

We are glad to escape to the armchair, where, after I have lit my pipe and W. V. has blown the elf of flame back to fairyland, we conspire — not overtly indeed, but each in his deep mind — how we shall baffle domestic tyranny and evade, if but for a few brief minutes of recorded time, the cubicular moment and the inevitable hand of the bath-maiden.

The critical instant occurs about half-way through my first pipe, and W. V.'s devices for respite or escape are at once innumerable and transparently ingenious. I admit my connivance without a blush, though I may perchance weakly observe: "One sees so little of her, mother;" for how delightful it is when she sings or recites — and no one would be so rude as to interrupt a song or recitation — to watch the little hands waving in "the air so blue," the little fingers flickering above her head in imitation of the sparks at the forge, the little arms nursing an imaginary weeping dolly, the blue eyes lit up with excitement as they gaze abroad from

Her Bed-time

the cherry-tree into the "foreign lands" beyond the garden wall.

She has much to tell me about the day's doings. Yes, she *has* been clay-modelling. I have seen some of her marvellous baskets of fruit and birds' nests and ivy leaves; but to-day she has been doing what dear old Mother Nature did in one of her happy moods some millenniums ago — making a sea with an island in it; and around the sea mountains, one a volcano with a crater blazing with red crayon; and a river with a bridge across it; quite a boldly conceived and hospitable fragment of a new planet. Of course Miss Jessie helped her, but she would soon be able, all by herself, to create a new world in which there should be ever-blossoming spring and a golden age, and fairies to make the impossible commonplace. W. V. does not put it in that way, but those, I fancy, would be the characteristics of a universe of her happy and innocent contriving.

In her early art days W. V. was distinctly Darwinian. Which was the cow, and which the house, and which the lady, was always a

nice question. One could differentiate with the aid of a few strokes of natural selection, but essentially they were all of the same protoplasm. Her explanations of her pictures afforded curious instances of the easy magic with which a breath of her little soul made all manner of dry bones live. I reproached her once with wasting paper which she had covered with a whirling scribble. "Why, father," she exclaimed with surprise, "that 's the north wind!" Her latest masterpiece is a drawing of a stone idol; but it is only exhibited on condition that, when you see it, you must "shake with fright."

At a *Kindergarten* one learns, of course, many things besides clay-modelling, drawing, and painting: poetry, for instance, and singing, and natural history; drill and ball-playing and dancing. And am I not curious — this with a glance at the clock which is on the stroke of seven — to hear the new verse of her last French song? Shall she recite "Purr, purr!" or "The Swing"? Or would it not be an agreeable change to have her sing "Up into the Cherry Tree," or "The Busy Blacksmith"?

Her Bed-time

Any or all of these would be indeed delectable, but parting is the same sweet sorrow at the last as at the first. However, we shall have one song. And after that a recitation by King Alfred! The king is the most diminutive of china dolls dressed in green velvet. She steadies him on the table by one leg, and crouches down out of sight while he goes through his performance. The Fauntleroy hair and violet eyes are the eyes and hair of King Alfred, but the voice is the voice of W. V.

When she has recited and sung I draw her between my knees and begin: "There was once a very naughty little girl, and her name was W. V."

"No, father, a good little girl."

"Well, there was a good little girl, and her name was Gladys."

"No, father, a *good* little girl called W. V."

"Well, a good little girl called W. V.; and she was 'quickly obedient'; and when her father said she was to go to bed, she said: 'Yes, father,' and she just *flew*, and gave no trouble."

"And did her father come up and kiss her?"

W. V.

"Why, of course, he did."

A few minutes later she is kneeling on the bed with her head nestled in my breast, repeating her evening prayer :

"Dear Father, whom I cannot see,
Smile down from heaven on little me.

Let angels through the darkness spread
Their holy wings about my bed.

And keep me safe, because I am
The heavenly Shepherd's little lamb.

Dear God our Father, watch and keep
Father and mother while they sleep ;

"and bless Dennis, and Ronnie, and Uncle John, and Auntie Bonnie, and Phyllis (did Phyllis used to squint when she was a baby? Poor Phyllis!) ; and Madame, and Lucille (she is only a tiny little child ; a quarter past three years or something like that) ; and Ivo and Wilfrid (he has bronchitis very badly ; he can't come out this winter ; are n't you sorry for him? Really a dear little boy)."

"Any one else?"

Her Bed-time

"Auntie Edie and Grandma. (*He* will have plenty to do, won't He?) "

"And 'Teach me' " — I suggest.

"Teach me to do what I am told,
And help me to be good as gold."

And a whisper comes from the pillow as I
tuck in the eider-down :

"Now He will be wondering whether I
am going to be a good girl."

VARIOUS VERSES

EAST OF EDEN

FAR down upon the plain the large round
moon

Sank red in jungle mist; but on the
heights

The cold clear darkness burned with restless
stars :

And, restless as the stars, the grim old King
Paced with fierce choleric strides the mon-
strous ridge

Of boulders piled to make the city wall.

Muttering his wrath within his cloudy beard,
He moved, and paused, and turned. The
starlight caught

The huge bent gold that ringed his giant
head,

W. V.

Gleamed on the jewel-fringed vast lion-
fells
That clothed his stature, ran in dusky play
Along the ponderous bronze that armed his
spear.

He fiercely scanned the East for signs of
dawn ;
Then shook his clenched hand above his
head,
And blazed with savage eyes and brow thrown
back
To front the awful Presence he addressed :

“Slay and make end ; or take some mortal
form
That I may strive with Thee ! Art Thou so
strong
And yet must smite me out of Thine Un-
seen ?
Long centuries have passed since Thou didst
place
Thy mark upon me, lest at any time
Men finding me should slay me. I have
grown

East of Eden

Feeble and hoary with the toil of years —
An aged palsy — now, alas, no more
That erst colossal adamant whereon
Thine hand engraved its vengeance. Be
 Thou just,
And answer when I charge Thee. Have I
 blenched
Before Thy fury ; have I bade Thee spare ;
Hath Thy long torture wrung one sob of
 pain,
One cry of supplication from my mouth ?
But Thou hast made Thyself unseen ; hast
 lain
In ambush to afflict me. Day and night
Thou hast been watchful. Thy vindictive
 eyes
Have known no slumber. Make Thyself a
 man
That I may seize Thee in my grips, and
 strive
But once on equal terms with Thee — but
 once.
Or send Thine angel with his sword of
 fire —
But no ; not him ! Come Thou, come Thou
 Thyself ;

W. V.

Come forth from Thine Invisible, and face
In mortal guise the mortal Thou has
plagued ! ”

The race of giants, sunk in heavy sleep
Within the cirque of those cyclopean walls,
Heard as it were far thunder in their dreams ;
But answer came there none from cloud or
star.

Then cried the aged King ;

“ A curse consume
Thy blind night fevered with the glare of stars,
Wild voices, and the agony of dreams !
Would it were day ! ”

At last the gleam of dawn
Swept in a long grey shudder from the East,
Then reddened o'er the misty jungle tracts.
The guards about the massive city gates
Fell back with hurried whispers : “ 'T is the
King ! ”

And forth, with great white beard and gold-
girt brows,
Huge spear, and jewelled fells, the giant strode
To slake his rage among the beasts of prey.

East of Eden

The fierce white splendour of a tropic noon ;
A sweltering waste of jungle, breathing flame ;
The sky one burning sapphire !

By a spring
Within the shadow of a bluff of rock
The hoary giant rested. At his feet
The cool green mosses edged the crystal
pool,
And flowers of blue and gold and rose-red
lulled
The weary eye with colour. As he sat
There rose a clamour from the sea of
canes ;
He heard a crash of boughs, a rush of feet ;
And, lo ! there bounded from the tangled
growth
A panting tiger mad with pain and rage.
The beast sprang roaring, but the giant
towered
And pashed with one fell buffet bone and
brain ;
Then staggered with a groan, for, keen and
swift,
At that same instant from the jungle flew
A shaft which to the feather pierced his
frame.

W. V.

Shrill cries of horror maddened round the
bluff :

“ Oh, Elohim, 't is Cain the King, the King ! ”
And weeping, tearing hair, and wringing
hands,
About him raved his lawless giant brood.

But Cain spoke slowly with a ghastly smile :
“ Peace, and give heed, for now I am but dead.
Let no man be to blame for this my death ;
Yea, swear a solemn oath that none shall
harm

A hair of him who gives me my release.
Come hither, boy ! ”

And, weeping, Lamech went
And stood before the face of Cain ; and Cain
Who pressed a hand against his rushing
wound

Reddened his grandson's brow and kissed his
cheek :

“ The blood of Cain alight on him who lifts
A hand against thy life. My spear, boys ! So.
Let no foot follow. Cain must die alone.
Let no man seek me till ye see in heaven
A sign, and know that Cain is dead.”

East of Eden

He smiled,
And from the hollow of his hand let fall
A crimson rain upon the crystal spring,
Which caught the blood in glassy ripple and
whirl,
And reddened moss and boulder.

Swift of stride,
With gold-girt brow thrown back to front the
Unseen,
The hoary giant through the jungle waste
Plunged, muttering in his beard ; and on-
ward pressed
Through the deep tangle of the trackless
growth
To reach some lair, where hidden and un-
heard
His savage soul in its last strife might
cope
With God — perchance one moment visible.

A sweltering tract of jungle, breathing flame ;
A fiery silence ; all the depth of heaven
One blinding sapphire !

Watching by the cliff,
The giant brood stood waiting for the sign.

W. V.

Behold ! a speck, high in the blazing blue,
Hung black — a single speck above the waste ;
Hung poised an hour ; then dropped through
 leagues of air,
Plumb as a stone ; and as it dropped they saw
Through leagues of high blue air, to north
 and south,
To east and west, black specks that sprang
 from space,
And then long sinuous lines of distant spots
Which flew converging — growing, as they
 flew,
To slanting streams and palpitating swarms ;
Which flew converging out of all the heavens,
And blackened, as they flew, the sapphire
 blaze,
And jarred the fiery hush with winnowing
 wings ;
Which flew converging on a single point
Deep in the jungle waste, and, as they
 swooped,
Paused in the last long slide with dangling
 claws,
Then dropped like stone.
 Thus knew the giant brood
That Cain was dead.

East of Eden

Beside a swamp they found
Hoar hair, a litter of white colossal bones, .
Ensanguined shreds of jewelled lion-fells,
The huge gold crown and ponderous spear
 of Cain,
And, fixed between the ribs, the fatal shaft
Which Lamech shot unwitting ; but against
The life of Lamech no man lifted hand.

GOODWIN SANDS

DID you ever read or hear
How the *Aid* — (God bless the *Aid* !
More earnest prayer than that was never
prayed.)
How the lifeboat, *Aid* of Ramsgate, saved the
London Fusilier ?

With a hundred souls on board,
With a hundred and a score,
— She was fast on Goodwin Sands.
— (May the Lord
Have pity on all hands —
Crew and captain — when a ship's on
Goodwin Sands !)

Goodwin Sands

In the smother and the roar
Of a very hell of waters — hard and fast —
She shook beneath the stroke
Of each billow as it broke,
And the clouds of spray were mingled with
the clouds of swirling smoke
As the blazing barrels bellowed in the blast !

And the women and the little ones were
frozen dumb with fear ;
And the strong men waited grimly for the
last ;
When — as clocks were striking two in
Ramsgate town —
The little *Aid* came down,
The *Aid*, the plucky *Aid* —
The *Aid* flew down the gale
With the glimmer of the moon upon her
sail ;
And the people thronged to leeward ; stared
and prayed —
Prayed and stared with tearless eye and
breathless lip,
While the little boat drew near.
Ay, and then there rose a shout —

W. V.

A clamour, half a sob and half a cheer —
As the boatmen flung the lifeboat anchor out,
And the gallant *Aid* sheered in beneath the
ship,
Beneath the shadow of the *London Fusilier* !

" We can carry may be thirty at a trip "
(Hurrah for Ramsgate town !)
" Quick, the women and the children ! "

O'er the side
Two sailors, slung in bowlines, hung to help
the women down —
Poor women, shrinking back in their dismay
As they saw their ark of refuge, smothered
up in spray,
Ranging wildly this and that way in the racing
of the tide ;
As they watched it rise and drop, with its
crew of stalwart men,
When a huge sea swung it upward to the
bulwarks of the ship,
And, sweeping by in thunder, sent it plunging
down again.

Goodwin Sands

Still they shipped them — nine-and-twenty.

(God be blessed !)

When a man with glaring eyes

Rushed up frantic to the gangway with a cry
choked in his throat —

Thrust a bundle in a sailor's ready hands.

Honest Jack, *he* understands —

Why, a blanket for a woman in the boat !

" Catch it, Bill ! "

And he flung it with a will ;

And the boatman turned and caught it, bless
him ! — caught it, tho' it slipped,

And, even as he caught it, heard an infant's
cries,

While a woman shrieked, and snatched it to
her breast —

" My baby ! "

So the thirtieth passenger was shipped !

Twice, and thrice, and yet again

Flew the lifeboat down the gale

With the moonlight on her sail —

With the sunrise on her sail —

W. V.

(God bless the lifeboat *Aid* and all her men !)
Brought her thirty at a trip
Thro' the hell of Goodwin waters as they
 raged around the ship,
Saved each soul aboard the *London Fusilier* !

If you live to be a hundred, you will ne'er —
You will ne'er in all your life,
Until you die, my dear,
Be nearer to your death by land or sea !

Was *she* there?
Who? — my wife?
Why, the baby in the blanket — that was she !

TRAFALGAR

O THE merry bells of Chester, ancient
Chester on the Dee !

On that glittering autumn morning,
eighteen five,

Every Englishman was glad to be
alive.

It was good to breathe this English air, to see
English earth, with autumn field and reddening
tree,

And to hear the bells of Chester, ancient
Chester on the Dee.

W. V.

For like morning-stars together, sweet and
shrill,

In a blithe recurrent cycle

Sang St. Peter and St. Michael,

John the Baptist and St. Mary on the Hill ;

And the quick exulting changes of their peal

Made the heavens above them laugh, and

the jubilant city reel.

In the streets the crowds were cheering.

Like a shout

From each spire the bickering bunting rol-

licked out.

O that buoyant autumn morning, eighteen
five,

Every Englishman rejoiced to be alive ;

And the heart of England throbbed from sea

to sea

As the joy-bells clashed in Chester, jovial

Chester on the Dee.

Hark, in pauses of the revel — sole and
slow —

Old St. Werburgh swung a heavy note of woe !

Trafalgar

Hark, between the jocund peals a single
toll,
Stern and muffled, marked the passing of a
soul !
English hearts were sad that day as sad
could be ;
English eyes so filled with tears they scarce
could see ;
And all the joy was dashed with grief in
ancient Chester on the Dee !

Loss and triumph—joy and sorrow ! Far
away
Drave the great fight's wreckage down
Trafalgar Bay.
O that glorious autumn morning, eighteen five,
Every Englishman was proud to be alive !
For the power of France was broken on the
sea —
But ten sail left of her thirty sail and three.
Yet sad were English men as sad could be,
For that, somewhere o'er the foreign wave,
they knew
Home to English ground and grass the dust
of Nelson drew.

W. V.

Would to God that on that morning, eighteen
five,
England's greatest man of all had been alive,
If but to breathe this English air, to see
English earth, with autumn field and yellow-
ing tree,
And to hear the bells of Chester, joyful
Chester on the Dee !

VIGNETTES

THE WANDERER

I

I MET a waif i' the hills at close of day.
He begged an alms ; I thought to say
him nay.

What was he? "Sir, a little dust," said he,
"Which life blows up and down, and death
will lay."

I gave — for love of beast and hill and tree,
And all the dust that has been and shall be.

THE WANDERER

II

HE knows no home ; he only knows
Hunger and cold and pain ;
The four winds are his bedfellows ;
His sleep is dashed with rain.

'Tis naught to him who fails, who thrives ;
He neither hopes nor fears ;
Some dim primeval impulse drives
His footsteps down the years.

The Wanderer

He could not, if he would, forsake
Lone road and field and tree.
Yet, think ! it takes a God to make
E'en such a waif as he.

And once a maiden, asked for bread,
Saw, as she gave her dole,
No friendless vagrant, but, instead,
An indefeasible Soul.

THE SCARECROW

HAIL Goodman-gossip of the corn !
When boughs are green and furrows
sprout
And blossom muffles every thorn,
Poor soul ! the farmer boards him out.

Men think, grim wight, his rags affright
The wingèd thieves from root and ear ;
But on his hat pert sparrows light —
Crows have been friends too long to fear !

The schoolboy's sling he heedeth not ;
No rancour nerves those palsied hands ;
In shocking hat and ancient coat,
A crazed and patient wretch he stands.

The Scarecrow

Without a murmur in the wheat,
Till fields are shorn and harvest's won,
He suffers cold, he suffers heat,
From chilly stars and scorching sun.

Though men forget, he dreameth yet
How in the golden past he stood,
'Mid flowers and wine, a shape divine
Of marble or of carven wood ;

How, in the loveliness and peace
Of that blithe age and radiant clime,
He was a garden-god of Greece.
Oh, vanished world ! Oh, fleeting time !

Gaunt simulacrum — ghost forlorn —
Grey exile from a splendid past —
Last god (in rags) of a creed outworn —
If pity 'll help thee, mine thou hast !

THE HAUNTED BRIDGE

WITH high-pitched arch, low parapet,
And narrow thoroughfare, it stands
As strong as when the mortar set
Beneath the Roman mason's hands.

An ancient ivy grips its walls,
Tall grasses tuft its coping-stones ;
Beneath, through citron shadow, falls
The stream in drowsy undertones.

The Haunted Bridge

No road leads hence. The stonechat flits
Along green fallow grey with stone ;
But here a dark-eyed urchin sits,
To whom the Painted Men were known.

Hush ! do not move, but only look.
When sunny days are long and fine
This Roman truant baits a hook,
Drops o'er the keystone here a line,

And, dangling sandalled feet, looks down
To see the swift trout dart and gleam —
Or scarcely see them, hanging brown
With heads against the clear brown stream.

THE STONE AGE

'T WAS not a vision ! Yet the oak
O'erarched the paleolithic Age ;
And homesteads of a pigmy folk
Were clustered 'neath its foliage.

Secreted in that sylvan space,
To archæologist unknown,
Stood, reared by some untutored race,
Strange rings and avenues of stone.

The little thorp deserted seemed ;
What prey had lured the tribe afar ?
One figure, lingering, sat and dreamed,
As lonely as the evening star.

The Stone Age

Bright-haired, blue-eyed, with naked feet,
And young face lit with rosy blood,
She rocked her babe, and dreamed the sweet
Primeval dream of motherhood.

A wondrous babe, that once had grown
A branch among the branches green —
For nurslings of the Age of Stone
Are mainly bairns of wood, I ween.

A mother strangely young, and sage
Beyond the summers she had told,
For mothers of that ancient Age
Are usually five years old.

God bless thy heart maternal, bless
Thy bower of stone, thy sheltering tree,
Thou small prospective ancestress
Of generations yet to be !

SEA-PICTURES

I

BLITHE morning ; sun and sea ! Zone
beyond zone,
Blue frolic waves and gold clouds softly blown.
One half the globe a sapphire glass which
swings
Doubling the sun.

No sail. No wink of wings.
No haze of land.

Sea-Pictures

Look ! who comes wafted here —
What lone yet all unfearful mariner?
You cannot see him? No ; he mocks the
sight —
Mid such immensities so mere a mite.

Look close ! That tiniest speck of brownish
red,
Perched on his single subtle spider-thread !

Trust, little aeronaut, thy filmy sail.
Blow wind ! the reef and palm-tree shall not
fail.

SEA-PICTURES

II

ENORMOUS sea ; immeasurable night !
The shoreless waters, heaving spectral-white,
Vibrate with showers and chains of golden sparks.

The black boat leaves a track of flame.
Beneath
Run trails of blazing emerald, where the sharks
Cross and re-cross. In many a starry wreath
Innumerable medusæ shine and float.

Sea-Pictures

Great luminaries, through the blue-green air,
Gleam on the face of one who slowly dies.
All through the night two cavernous glazed
 eyes
Look blankly upward in a rigid stare.

O Father in heaven, he cannot speak Thy
 name ;
Take pity for the sake of Christ, Thy son !

There is no answer, none. No answer, none.

Crossing, re-crossing underneath the boat,
The lean sharks weave their web of emerald
 flame.

MOONLIGHT

SWEET moon, endreaming tower and tree,
Is thy pathetic radiance thrown
From ice-cold wealds and cirques of stone —
Hush'd moors where life has ceased to be?

Did grass, long ages back, and flowers
Grow there? Did living waters run?
Did happy creatures bless the sun
And greet with joy this world of ours?

Moonlight

And, earlier yet, in one starred zone,
Did this bright planet sweep through space —
Glebe of our glebe, race of our race —
A part and parcel of our own?

O moonlight silvering tower and tree !
O part of *my* world torn away,
Part of my life, now lifeless clay,
My dead, shine too — shine down on me !

GREEN PASTURES

WHEN springing meads are freshly
dight,
And trees new-leafed throw scarce a
shadow,
The green earth shows no fairer sight
Than soft-eyed kine and blowing meadow.
Too calm for care, too slow for mirth,
Amid the shower, amid the gleam,
The great mild mother-creatures seem
Half-waking forms o' the dreamy earth.

Green Pastures

And down the pathway through the grass
To school the merry children pass,
Singing a rhyme in the April morns,
How — *There's red for the furrows, and
white for the daisies,
Brown eyes for the brooks, for the trees
crumpled horns !*

When quivering leaves, and oes of light
Between the leaves, the deep sward dapple,
When may-boughs cream in curdling white,
And maids envÿ the bloom o' the apple,
The great mild mother-creatures lie,
And grow, in absence of the sun,
One with the moon and stars, and one
With silvery cloud and darkest sky.

And down the pathway through the grass
To school the merry children pass,
Singing a rhyme in the morns of June,
How — *There's white for the cloudlets, and
black for the darkness,
And two polished horns for the sweet sickle
moon.*

THE LITTLE DIPPER

LITTLE Dipper, piping sweet
in the shrewd mid-winter weather ;
Nesting in the linn, where spray
splashes nest and sprinkles feather ;

'Neath the fringes of the ice,
down the burn-side, blithely diving ;
Piping, piping with full throat, —
bite the frost or be snow driving :

Life's white winter comes apace ;
oh, but gaily shall I bide it
If my bosom, like thy nest,
house a singing-bird inside it !

IN THE HILLS

HIS hoar breath stings with rime the
skater's face.

Mirrored in jet, beneath his hissing feet,
The stars swarm past, and radiate as they
fleet,
The immemorial cold of cosmic space.

NATURE'S MAGIC

GIVE her the wreckage of strife —
Tumulus, tumbled tower,
Each clod and each stone she 'll make her
own
With the grass and innocent flower.

Give her the Candlemas snow,
Smiling she 'll take the gift,
And out of the flake a snowdrop make,
And a lambkin out of the drift.

APRIL VOICES

THE birches of your London square
 "Have leafed into an emerald haze"?
Then come—you promised; come and share
 The fuller spring of *our* last April days.
The ash, who wastes whole golden weeks in
 doubt,
The very ash is long since out;
The apple-boughs are muffled—do but
 think!—
With crowded bloom of maid's blush, white
 and pink;
The whins are all ablaze!

W. V.

Picture the pigeons tumbling in bright air !
Fancy the jet-eyed squirrel on the
bough !
Leave the poor birches in your London
square ;
The spring and we await you here, and
now.

Beneath our old world thatch your pulse
shall beat
To the large-leisured rhythm of wood-
land ease ;
No feverish hurry haunts our otiose
trees ;
Your slumber shall be sweet.

The little brown bird's nest,
The four blue eggs beneath the patient
breast,
The lambkin's baby face,
The joy of liquid air
And azure space —
Are these not better than your dingy
square,

April Voices

Your mazes of inhospitable stone,
Your crowds who cannot call their souls their
 own,
Your Dance of Life-in-death?
Come to the fields, where Toil draws whole-
 some breath,
And Indigence still keeps her apron
 white.

Enough that you arrive too late to hear
 The migrants in the night !
When wild March winds have dropt, and all
 is still,
A spirit-touch unseals the dreaming
 eyes ;
One starts, and, leaning from the window-
 sill,
Catches the liquid notes, heard fine and
 clear
In hushed dark skies.

How pleasant had it been to watch with you,
 Day after day,
The fairy flowering of the hawthorn
 spray !

W. V.

Each thorn upon the stem
Protects one rose-tipped, green-and-
golden gem ;
A bud, a thorn ! — 't is thus the whole tree
through.
No, — where in tender shoots the branches
end
There is no spear !
But bud and bud and bud are crowded
here ;
'T is Nature's cue
To lavish most what least she can defend.

Come to the woods and see
How in the warm wet sunny mist of morn
Green leaves, like thoughts in dreamful
hours, are born,
And in the mist birds pipe on every tree.
Come, and the mossy boulder on the hill
Shall teach what beauty springs of sitting
still.
The world's work ! Is the life not more
than meat ?
And is this shrill immitigable strife,
This agony of existence, life ?

April Voices

The good earth calls with voices strangely
sweet ;

Come to your mother earth — th' old English
earth,

The ruddy mother of a mighty race —
Dear ruddy earth, with early wheat
Pale green on plough ridge and with kindly
grass

New sprung in fields that take no care !

Come to the friends who love your
eager face ;

Come share our rustic peace, our frugal
mirth ;

Come, and restrict for once your happy Muse
To the four hundred words we yokels use
For life and love and death — why all the
lore

Of ancient Egypt hardly needed more !

Will London miss her poet? There, alas !

No man is missed. Come make our
roof your own,

And leave the birches dreaming in your
square

Of forests far beyond the maze of stone.

GREEN SKY

GREY on the linden leaves ;
Green in the west ;
Under our gloaming eaves
Swifts in the nest ;
Over the mother a human roof ;
Over the fledglings a breast.

SUB UMBRA CRUCIS

THE SHEPHERD BEAUTIFUL

OFT as I muse on Rome — and at her
name
Out of the darkness, flushed with blood
and gold,
Smoulders and flashes on her seven-
fold height
The imperial, murderous, harlot Rome of
old,
Rome of the lions, Rome of the awful
light
Where “living torches” flame —
I thread in thought the Catacombs’ blind maze,
Marvelling how men could then draw
happy breath,
And cheer these sunless labyrinths of death
With one sweet dream of Christ told many
ways.

W. V.

The Shepherd Beautiful! O good and
sweet,
O Shepherd ever lovely, ever young,
Was it because they gathered at Thy feet,
Because upon Thy pastoral pipe they
hung,
That they were happy in those evil days,
That these grim crypts were arched with
heavenly blue,
And spaced in verdurous vistas lit with
streams?
Ah, let me count the ways,
Fair Shepherd of the world, in which they
drew
Thee in that most divine of human
dreams.

They limned Thee standing near the wattled
shed,
The strayed sheep on Thy shoulders, and
the flock
Bleating fond welcome. Seasons of the
year —
Spring gathering roses swung athwart the
rock,

The Shepherd Beautiful

Summer and Autumn, one with golden
ear,
And one with apple red,
And shrivel'd Winter burning in a heap
Dead leaves — they pictured round
Thee ; for they said,
“ All the year round ” — and joyous tears
were shed —
“ All the year round, Thou, Shepherd,
lov'st Thy sheep.”

Sometimes they showed Thee piping in the
shade
Music so sweet each mouth was raised
from grass
And ceased to hunger. In some dewy glade
Where the cool waters ran as clear as
glass,
To this or that one Thou would'st seem to
say,
“ Thou 'st made me glad, be happy thou
in turn ! ”
And sometimes Thou would'st sit in
weariness —
My Shepherd ! “ *quærens me*

W. V.

Sedisti lassus" — while Thy dog would
yearn,
Eyes fixed on Thee, aware of Thy
distress.

So limned they Christ ; and bold, yet not
too bold,
Smiled at the tyrant's torch, the lion's cry ;
So nursed the child-like heart, the
angelic mind,
Goodwill to live, and fortitude to die,
And love for men, and hope for all
mankind.

One Shepherd and one fold !
Such was their craving ; none should be
forbid ;

All — all were Christ's ! And so they drew
once more

The Shepherd Beautiful. But now He bore
No lamb upon His shoulders — just a kid.

THE MOSS

WHEN black despair beats down my
wings,
And heavenly visions fade away —
Lord, let me bend to common things,
The tasks of every day ;

As, when th' aurora is denied
And blinding blizzards round him beat,
The Samoyad stoops, and takes for guide
The moss beneath his feet.

A CAROL

THIS gospel sang the angels bright :
Lord Jhesu shall be born this night ;
Born not in house nor yet in hall,
Wrapped not in purple nor in pall,
Rocked not in silver, neither gold ;
This word the angels sang of old ;
Nor christened with white wine nor red ;
This word of old the angels said
Of Him which holdeth in His hand
The strong sea and green land.

A Carol

*This thrice and four times happy night —
These tidings sang the angels bright —
Forlorn, betwixen ear and horn,
A babe shall Jhesu Lord be born,
A weeping babe in all the cold; —
This word the angels sang of old —
And wisps of hay shall be his bed;
This word of old the angels said
Of Him which keepeth in His hand
The strong sea and green land.*

*O babe and Lord, Thou Jhesu bright, —
Let all and some now sing this night —
Betwixt our sorrow and our sin,
Be thou new-born our hearts within;
New-born, dear babe and little King,
So letten some and all men sing —
To wipe for us our tears away!
This night so letten all men say
Of Him which spake, and lo ! they be —
The green land and strong sea.*

WHEN SNOW LIES DEEP

WHEN frost has burned the hedges
black,
And children cannot sleep for cold ;
When snow lies deep on the withered leaves,
And roofs are white from ridge to eaves ;
When bread is dear, and work is slack,
Take pity on the poor and old !

The faggot and the loaf of bread
You could not miss would be their store.
Upon how little the old can live !
Give like the poor — who freely give.
Remember, when the fire burns red
The wolf leaves sniffing at the door.

When Snow Lies Deep

And you whose lives are left forlorn,
Whose sons, whose hopes, whose fires have
died,
Oh, you poor pitiful people old,
Remember this and be consoled —
That Christ the Comforter was born,
And still is born, in wintertide.

“TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

CHAINED to the dungeon-wall she slept.
Rome, moonlit, revelled overhead.
She heard not. She had prayed and wept,
Haggard with anguish, wild with dread.

She was too fair, too young to die ;
Life was too sweet, and home too dear !
God touch'd her with His sleep : a sigh —
And she had ceased to weep or fear !

She slept, and, sleeping, seemed awake :
A fair Child held her virgin hand ;
They walk'd by an enchanted lake ;
They walk'd in a celestial land.

“Trees of Righteousness”

One thing she saw, and one she heard.

There were a thousand red-rose trees ;
Each rose-red leaf sang like a bird,

“What trees, dear Child,” she asked,
“are these?”

“These,” said the Child, “are called Love’s
Bower ;

They fade not ; constantly they sing ;
Each flower appears more fire than flower.
Now, see the roots from which they
spring ! ”

She looked ; she saw, far down the night,
The earth, the city whence she came,
And Nero’s gardens red with light —
The light of martyrs wrapped in flame.

She woke with Heaven still in her eyes.
Rome, moonlit, revelled overhead.
She feared no more the lions’ cries ;
Flames were but flowers, and death was
dead !

THE COMRADES

IN solitary rooms, when dusk is falling,
I hear from fields beyond the haunted
mountains,
Beyond the unrepentable forests, —
I hear the voices of my comrades calling,
“Home ! home ! home !”

Strange ghostly voices, when the dusk is
falling,
Come from the ancient years ; and I
remember
The schoolboy shout, from plain and
wood and river,
The signal-cry of scattered comrades, calling,
“Home ! home ! home !”

The Comrades

And home we wended when the dusk was
falling ;
The pledged companions, talking, laugh-
ing, singing ;
Home through the grey French country,
no one missing.
And now I hear the old-time voices calling,
" Home ! home ! home ! "

I pause and listen while the dusk is falling ;
My heart leaps back through all the
long estrangement
Of changing faith, lost hopes, paths dis-
enchanted ;
And tears drop as I hear the voices calling,
" Home ! home ! home ! "

I hear you while the dolorous dusk is falling ;
I sigh your names — the living — the
departed !
O vanished comrades, is it *yours* the
poignant
Pathetic note among the voices calling,
" Home, home, home " ?

W. V.

Call, and still call me, for the dusk is falling.

Call for I fain, I fain would come, but
cannot.

Call, as the shepherd calls upon the
moorland.

Though mute, with beating heart I hear your
calling,

“Home ! home ! home !”

“CRYING ABBA, FATHER”

ABBA, in Thine eternal years
Bethink Thee of our fleeting day ;
We are but clay ;
Bear with our foolish joys, our foolish tears,
And all the wilfulness with which we
pray !

I have a little maid who, when she leaves
Her father and her father's threshold, grieves,
But being gone, and life all holiday,
Forgets my love and me straightway ;
Yet, when I write,
Kisses my letters, dancing with delight,

W. V.

Cries "Dearest father!" and in all her glee
For one brief live-long hour remembers me.
Shall I in anger punish or reprove?
Nay, this is natural; she cannot guess
How one forgotten feels forgetfulness;
And I am glad thinking of her glad face,
And send her little tokens of my love.

And Thou — wouldst Thou be wroth in such
a case?

And crying Abba, I am fain
To think no human father's heart
Can be so tender as Thou art,
So quick to feel our love, to feel our
pain.

When she is froward, querulous or wild,
Thou knowest, Abba, how in each offence
I stint not patience lest I wrong the child,
Mistaking for revolt defect of sense,
For wilfulness mere spriteliness of mind;
Thou know'st how often, seeing, I am blind;
How when I turn her face against the wall

“Crying Abba, Father”

And leave her in disgrace,
And will not look at her or speak at all,
I long to speak and long to see her face ;
And how, when twice, for something grievous
done,
I could but smite, and though I lightly smote,
I felt my heart rise strangling in my throat ;
And when she wept I kissed the poor red hands.

All these things, Father, a father understands ;
And am not I Thy son ?

Abba, in Thine eternal years
Bethink Thee of our fleeting day ;
From all the rapture of our eyes and ears
How shall we tear ourselves away ?
At night my little one says nay,
With prayers implores, entreats with tears
For ten more flying minutes' play ;
How shall we tear ourselves away ?
Yet call, and I'll surrender
The flower of soul and sense,
Life's passion and its splendour,
In quick obedience.

W. V.

If not without the blameless human tears
By eyes which slowly glaze and darken shed,
Yet without questionings or fears
For those I leave behind when I am dead.
Thou, Abba, know'st how dear
My little child's poor playthings are to her ;
What love and joy
She has in every darling doll and precious toy ;
Yet when she stands between my knees
To kiss good-night, she does not sob in sorrow,
" Oh, father, do not break or injure these ! "
She knows that I shall fondly lay them by
For happiness to-morrow ;
So leaves them trustfully. And shall not I ?

Whatever darkness gather
O'er coverlet or pall,
Since Thou art Abba, Father,
Why should I fear at all ?

Thou 'st seen how closely, Abba, when at rest
My child's head nestles to my breast ;

“Crying Abba, Father”

And how my arm her little form enfolds,
Lest in the darkness she should feel alone ;
And how she holds
My hands, my hands, my two hands in her own ?

A little easeful sighing
And restful turning round,
And I too, on Thy love relying,
Shall slumber sound.

THIS grace vouchsafe me for the rhymes
I write.
If any last, nor perish quick and quite,
Lord, let them be
My little images, to stand for me
When I may stand no longer in Thy sight :

Like those old statues of the King who said,
“Carve me in that which needs nor sleep nor
bread ;
Let diorite pray,
A King of stone, for this poor King of clay
Who wearies often and must soon be dead !”



ANNEX

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